

**CHURCH AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATION:  
THE ASIAN SYNOD – FABC CHALLENGES****CONTENTS**

- Introduction
- I. The Asian Synod and Social Communication: A Documentation
  - II. Social Communication in *Ecclesia in Asia* and recent FABC Documents
  - III. Consultation on Evangelization and Social Communication. Orientations and Recommendations
  - IV. Modern Communication Technologies: Challenge for the Church in Asia  
Orientations and Recommendations (BISCOM II, 1999)
  - V. Social Communication Formation in Priestly Ministry and Mission. Orientations and Recommendations (BISCOM III, 2001)
  - VI. Megatrends Asia: Communication Trends for the Church?  
Final Considerations of FABC-OSC Bishops' Meet 1999
  - VII. A Renewed Church in Asia: Communicating Love and Service. Final Considerations of FABC-OSC Bishops' Meet 2000
  - VIII. Radio Veritas Asia: Missionary in Asia
  - IX. Radio Veritas Asia: Programming for the Future

**INTRODUCTION**

This FABC Paper is a follow-up to FABC Paper No. 85 on "The Catholic Church in Asia and Social Communication," published August, 1999.

The paper contains a documentation on Social Communication at the Roman "Synod on Asia" in 1998 and on the final document of the same Synod *Ecclesia in Asia*, which was published November 1999 in New Delhi.

After these, there follow different Orientations and Recommendations, and final statements of meetings organized by the FABC Office of Social Communication.

The Consultation on "Evangelization and Social Communication"

was jointly organized by the two pertinent FABC offices. The full texts of the presentations at this consultation are published as a book under the same title by Fr. Mario Saturnino Dias (St. Paul's, Mumbai, 2000).

The Orientations and Recommendations of two "Bishops' Institutes for Social Communication" (BISCOM) on *Modern Communication Technologies* (II, 1999) and *Social Communication Formation in Priestly Ministry and Mission* (III, 2001) are next. BISCOM II on modern communication technologies had a follow-up in May 2001 with a "hands-on" training seminar for bishops on computer, Internet, etc., in co-operation with Assumption University in Bangkok.

From the final considerations of the annual meetings of Asian communication bishops ("FABC-OSC Bishops' Meet") the meeting on *Megatrends Asia* (1999) was especially appreciated. The 2000 meeting followed the theme of the FABC Plenary Assembly of January 2000, on "A Renewed Church in Asia: Communicating Love and Service."

The operations and financing of "Radio Veritas Asia" as a missionary for Asia are the responsibility of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). A paper, which was presented at the annual assembly of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications at the Vatican (March 2001), is added, along with a keynote address, which opened a program-planning conference for the short-wave radio station in August 2000.

This documentation should give an overview about social communication concerns of the Church in Asia from the FABC point of view as of mid-2001.

Franz-Josef Eilers, svd  
Executive Secretary

**I. THE ASIAN SYNOD AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATION:  
A DOCUMENTATION  
by FRANZ-JOSEF EILERS, svd**

The Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, from April 18 to May 14, 1998, followed similar continental assemblies for Africa, Europe and the Americas. These assemblies are complementary to the universal Synods of Bishops, which were introduced by Pope Paul VI as a follow-up of the Second Vatican Council. The

special continental assemblies are also to prepare for the Great Jubilee of the year 2000. By then, with the synods for Oceania (November-December, 1998) and Europe (1999) still to come, all continents of the world will have had special assemblies. Such synods are occasions to consider in depth the situation, needs and possibilities for the Church's in those continents. The participants get to know each other better and strengthen co-operation for common concerns. For the Holy Father and Roman Curia they provide an opportunity to know better the needs and expectations of the peoples of these countries.

The preparations for the "Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Asia" started in a concrete way with the publication of the theme: *Jesus Christ the Savior and His Mission of Love and Service in Asia: "That they may have life and have it abundantly" (Jn.10;10)*; and of the *Lineamenta*, an outline of the theme as a basis for discussion. The document was published in 1996. The Bishops' Conferences and other interested persons and organizations had until August, 1997 to comment on this document, and to answer the 14 questions of the appendix, both of which were supposed to be the basis for the final working document of the Synod, the *Instrumentum Laboris*. Generally, the *Lineamenta* was criticized for being too general, and not very specific on the Asian situation of the Church.

### **The *Lineamenta***

The mass media are mentioned in a special way in the first chapter, which described "Asian Realities," where they are seen as part of "Socio-Economic Development," in the section "Trials and Challenges in Asia"(No.5). The need for education and formation in the use of mass media is especially underlined:

Not to be underestimated in the rapid changes taking place on the Asian continent is the impact of the mass media. Pope Paul VI, seeing its far-reaching effects, described it as a most powerful means of social transformation (Apostolic Letter, *Octogesimo Adveniens*, 20). Where the mass media have made many positive contributions to development to the many countries in Asia, the beneficial effects can sometimes be outweighed by the fact that these means are liable to be manipulated by those with vested interests. In some cases, the media are controlled by powerful political, economic and ideological forces. Since the mass media can sometimes be a means of cultural invasion, undermining the traditional religious and family values in Asia, education

and formation as to their use are very important (cf. John Paul II, Letter to the Delegates of the FABC Vth Plenary Assembly, Bandung, 1990)."

Mass media are further mentioned in passing as significant events in Asian mission history (No.13), and "important contributions" of the young Churches of Asia (No.14).

Beyond the mass media the *Lineamenta* speak of God's *self-communication* (Nos.17 ff.) in mission, Christ's mission as *communicating* Divine Life (No.26), and the mission of the Church as deriving "from God's own *communication* of his Trinitarian Life to the Church" (No. 27, cf. No.29). In the sharing of communion the need for *dialogue* in ecumenism (No.28) is underlined, and again mentioned as a "path of evangelization." The mission of the Church is described as one of dialogue: "Dialogue is a part of the work of evangelization because it is a means of mutual knowledge, enrichment and *communication* of the saving message and life of Jesus Christ (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 8)" (No.33).

The *Lineamenta* conclude by saying that the Church, as in her early times, seeks to preach Christ "so that the riches of his life might be *communicated* again to those who will open their hearts to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in conversion" (No.38).

Among the 14 questions at the end of the *Lineamenta* document, which "should be the basis of all responses" (Preface), is included that of "The Church's Mission of Love and Service" (Ch.VI), question 12:

What has the Church done in your area to use the means of social communications in the Church's evangelizing *mission*, especially the press, radio, television, film, video, Internet, etc.? What initiatives need to be taken in the future?

In the formulation of this question, the vision of *social* communication as being almost exclusively confined to the mass media is continued. A broader vision of communication, comprising all the means, ways and dynamics of communicating within human society, introduced by Vatican II as social communication, is missing. The question also seems to refer only to the external communication of the Church in evangelizing but does not look at the internal communication within the Asian Church itself. The world of social communication, described by *Redemptoris Missio* (No.37c) as a "New

Areopagus," and creating a "new culture," does not surface in the *Lineamenta*.

### *The Instrumentum Laboris*

These and other shortcomings are addressed in the *Instrumentum Laboris*, the working document of the actual synod, which was published on February 28, 1998, less than two months before the final assembly. The *Instrumentum Laboris* is a summary of the comments and suggestions made by different bishops' conferences and other Church bodies, which were sometimes quite outspoken. As for social communication, the document shows a much broader view, and addresses the issues more extensively.

1. The *threat and challenge of modern communication technologies* for the people of Asia are expressed several times. Thus, the document says in the first section (Chapter 1) under "Culture" in Asian Realities (No.9):

Some responses indicate that the economic state of affairs is having collateral effects. New forms of culture are resulting from an over-exposure of the mass media, books, magazines, music, films and other forms of entertainment. Although the media have the potential of being a great force for the good, many responses mention that what seems to be reaching the Asian market is having an opposite effect. Its images of violence, hedonism, unbridled individualism, and materialism are striking at the heart of Asian cultures, at the religious character of people, families and whole societies. Many responses lament the fact that the sacredness of marriage, the stability of family, and other traditional values are being threatened by the media and entertainment industries on the Asian continent. Such a situation is posing serious challenges to the Church's message.

Similar considerations are repeated, more in passing, in the demand for peoples of all faiths to address the crises posed by globalization and economic situations and counter-values, which are promoted by "the *media pressure* of an alien 'pop' monoculture." "Despite being a 'little flock,' the Church in Asia is called to address and respond to such sweeping issues. Many times this will involve programs of dialogue and co-operation with other religions" (No.39). "Some responses are concerned that the *power of Western media and advertising industry* are producing a universal 'mono-culture' which threatens to drive traditional Asian cultures to extinction" (no. 50).

The "new ways" of communicating, as threat and challenge, are again mentioned in section No. 53, which is totally devoted to the means of social communication under the general chapter (VII) on "Missionary Proclamation" in "The Church's Mission of Love and Service in Asia."

2. "*Ecclesial Realities of Asia*" (Chapter II) have been and are also social communication realities. The Churches of the Orient have "a significant presence in the field of education, social and health services, and *mass media*" (no.11). The Church in Asia is said further to have "a good number of *publishing centers* for books, reviews, newspapers, weeklies, popular magazines. In recent years a number of ... *audio-visual centers* and *broadcasting stations* have also been started by Christians in Asia" (No.17).

The *Catholic Mission History of Asia* (Chapter III, No. 20) in Asia is a history as well of communicating:

Christian mission in general has been an agent of the advancement of culture. In fact, many missionaries were men and women outstanding as *linguists*, scholars, historians, *poets* and scientists. Many *Asian languages* were put into writing; and foundational books, such as grammars, dictionaries, etc., were done by missionaries. Besides making significant contributions to existing Asian languages, both classical and modern, *missionaries* also translated many *Christian classics* into several Asian languages, thus enriching many languages. In this way they also gained the respect and gratitude of many non-Christians. They also became engaged in the *publication of popular magazines, scientific reviews, weeklies, daily newspapers and scholarly books* ... In several parts of Asia, missionaries are responsible for the establishment of libraries at the popular and scholarly levels.

In a related manner, higher rates of *literacy* and education have also accompanied the spread of the Gospel, particularly in Asia, where in many areas education was limited to the higher classes of society. The Church has undertaken programs to help *eliminate illiteracy* in Asia and increase the level of education of its people, providing educational opportunities at the elementary level, as well as at higher levels of learning...

3. As for the *pastoral approach in a New Evangelization in Asia* the *Instrumentum Laboris* presents the following considerations:

a. One of the many ways of communicating/evangelizing in an Asian manner, and following the example of Jesus Christ himself, "would be through the *use of stories and parables* coming from the Bible" (No.27). "The lives of the Asian people of today, at the individual, family and social levels, are deeply permeated by religious sentiments and practices. *Popular religious practices*, places of pilgrimage, centers of prayer and dialogue, myths and stories, bring the philosophical religion to the levels of the masses..." (No.23).

We further should not forget that "God's Word has an inherent power to touch the hearts of all peoples, both Christians and believers of other faiths. In all Asian religions, the *word is highly venerated*. Religious leaders, profoundly shaped by the sacred word of their religions, use them widely in their own missionary work. At the same time, the Sacred Scriptures are shown great veneration by believers of other religions" (No. 42).

b. The Asian "Church as Communion" (Chapter VI) has consequences for "The Church's Mission of Service and Love in Asia" (Chapter VII), and cannot be seen without the *communicating witness of life*. This refers in a very special way also to the fact that "because the emphasis in Asia has always been on religious experience rather than on dogma, many maintain that Christ is better communicated, not in a purely theoretical or verbal level in an orderly presentation of doctrines, but through a *shared experience*. In Asia, the medium of approaching the Absolute or Divine is not word, but *silence*. The most effective and credible proclamation of the Risen Lord is the unspoken witness of a person who has undergone a deep God-experience and whose life is transformed accordingly." This has consequences for the personal life of a communicator but also gives one direction for the content and presentation of communication programs, possibly in co-operation with people from other religions. In communicating, we "need to elaborate an *Asian understanding of evangelization* in which interaction, dialogue, witness, service and proclamation are all seen as integral elements of the Church's evangelizing mission" (No.47).

The "Renewal of Prayer Life" in Asia (No. 48) refers to the "elements of Asian spirituality being in crisis and endangered through modern culture." This contains a special challenge for communication: how to *support existing values*; and how to promote and defend them in such a way that they reflect Asian culture; and at the

same time "communicate Christ" (Cf. 2nd FABC Plenary Assembly, Calcutta, 1978).

c. The "*Service of Dialogue*" (No. 49) as interaction is a communication process and must be based on the principles and experiences of human communication.

Among the more concrete and programmed initiatives in this field taking place in Asia (No.32) courses on Asian religions, "active involvement in social issues with the followers of other religions," "joint charitable programs," "open and public gestures of mutual respect at special religious periods, etc." are mentioned, which should include also *joint inter-religious communication undertakings* for the good of the communities.\*

---

\* It may be interesting to compare this section of the Asian Synod *Instrumentum Laboris* with the respective social communication section of the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the American Synod (No. 21), which took place November/December, 1997:

*The Gospel and the Means of Social Communication*

21. All the answers to the *Lineamenta* are in broad agreement that one of the "modern Arcopagus" requiring urgent evangelization is that of the means of social communication. The fundamental reason for this urgent need is the influence exercised by the media over almost every individual. Reference is quite rightly made to a "mass culture" which affects persons, changing their way of thinking, their values and style of behavior. In contrast, many answers confirm the scarce presence—in certain cases, the complete absence—of the Church in the field of the means of social communication.

A common point of agreement is the need to deal with this question at two levels:

- 1) The use of the media to transmit the Gospel message and the Magisterium of the Church. At this level, even where the Church in all America is utilizing various means in the media to transmit her news (periodicals, various publications, radio and television broadcasts, computer networks, etc.), there is evidence that the use made of these media is often inadequate for lack of updated equipment, economic resources and sufficiently-skilled personnel.
- 2) The integration of the Gospel message in this "new culture" created by modern communications. The evangelization of present-day culture indeed depends to a large extent on the influence of the media. At this level, there is a need to bring the values of the Gospel to bear on the ethical principles underlying the handling of information, the content of communication transmitted to the masses, and the goals of working in the world of communications. Many times, the responses indicate that frequently the goal of the agents of communications is economic gain and not the promotion of the person.



4. The possibilities, challenges and needs of the Church for Social Communication in Asia are summarized in the special section No. 53 of the *Instrumentum Laboris* on "the Means of Social Communication."

53. The Church today seeks to preach the perennial saving message of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, so that the riches of his life might always be communicated to those who will open their hearts in conversion to the promptings of the Spirit.

The responses to the *Lineamenta* note that, since the mass media have a growing influence even in remote areas of the Asian continent, the proclamation of the Gospel message can greatly benefit by better employing this modern technology. Some ask for a more inclusive view of the term "means of social communication," going beyond the customary idea of the technical structures and processes of communication in human society. In speaking of the means of evangelization, Pope Paul VI listed along with the mass media: witness of life, preaching, personal contact, and popular piety. In the Asian context, all the traditional forms of human communication from Asian cultures can be added, such as dance, theatre, drama, speech, shadow plays, etc. In this way, a particularly rich communication spectrum provides possibilities in the work of evangelization, far beyond what is possible solely through the restrictive term "mass media."

Responses further maintain that the communications explosion in Asia through satellites, Internet, video-conferencing, etc., raises a new challenge for evangelization. As Pope John Paul II states in the encyclical letter *Redemptoris Missio*, the means of social communication "have become so important as to be for many the chief means of information and education, of guidance and inspiration in their behavior as individuals, families and within society at large. In particular, the younger generation is growing up in a world conditioned by the mass media" (n. 46). The Holy Father then asks: "Since the very evangelization of modern culture depends to a great extent on the influence of the media, it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate that message into the new culture created by modern communication. ... The new culture

originates not just from whatever content is eventually expressed, but from the very fact that there exist new ways of communicating with a new language, new techniques and new psychology" (n. 47). How far is the Church in Asia responding to these "new ways"?

Modern means of social communication challenge the Church in Asia towards three concrete areas of action:

1) the Church in Asia needs to *increase her presence in the world of the mass media* in order to communicate the Gospel message as well as the social and moral teachings of the Magisterium;

2) the Church needs to *enter into the "modern Areopagus"* through the means of social communications in order to *evangelize society and transform*, through the values of the Gospel, the new culture being shaped by the means of social communication; and

3) all Church personnel, both clerical and lay, need to receive *adequate exposure and training in the use of the mass media and means of social communications*. At the same time, the Gospel must be brought into the lives of those who control and those who are engaged in the mass media in different ways.

4) The three "concrete areas of action" of this text should be extended to: that *every Christian must be a communicator* in his/her own way in the Spirit of the Acts of the Apostles, where the Faith was spread in a short time over the whole world of those days even without any modern means of transport and communication, because of the communicating Spirit of the believers.

5. Communication as a theological principle and foundation is expressed (No.31) in the purpose of creation as "communication of divine life and goodness to all human beings," quoting St. Bonaventure: "God created all things not to increase his glory and goodness, but to manifest and *communicate* them."

The chapter on "Church as Communion" (VI), as the central theological grounding of the whole document, cannot be fully understood without seeing *communication* as a theological principle, and essential for creating communion. There is no Church as communion and communion of communities (FABC) without proper communicating with God and between the members of the community *ad intra* and *ad extra*. Thus, very often "communion" and "commu-

nication" can be equaled, which would, for example, read in the section on the ecclesiology of Vatican II (No. 35): The Church as *communication* is founded on Trinitarian *communication*. She is the sign and binding force of *communication* between God and humanity. She is a *communication* of all the disciples of Jesus, and she is the locus and symbol of communication among all peoples." In applying this to the three-fold dialogue of the Church in Asia, with the poor, other religions and Asian cultures, this should "provide the concrete manner for announcing (*communicating*) the person and message of Jesus through acts of love and service. Such a dialogue (*communication*) would also inspire and provide a method for the Church's mission" (No.37).

### *The Special Assembly*

The Synod of Bishops' Special Assembly for Asia comprised not only the FABC — member countries and associates but also countries of the Middle and Near East, as well as Central Asia, comprising those countries of the Asian part of the former Soviet Republic. Members of the Synod are the cardinals and the presidents of the bishops' conferences of the participating countries. Further, there are the bishops elected by their bishops' conferences according to the total membership of these conferences, e.g., bishops' conferences with 100 and more members elect one bishop for every ten of its members. Added are the heads of the Vatican dicasteries, and those especially designated by the Pope as experts of the Special Secretary of the Synod, and auditors. There were in addition ten superiors general from different religious congregations and five 'fraternal delegates" from other Christian churches of Asia, but no representatives of other Asian religions.

The Special Assembly of the Synod itself lasted from April 19 to May 14, 1998, and the proceedings were structured like other synods before. After interventions from some 260 participants in the first part, where Pope John Paul II was always personally present, there followed the *circuli minores* or work groups, for further discussions on questions put by the Synod Secretariat. From the eleven work-groups, eight were in English, two in French and one in Italian. Their membership was made up from different parts of Asia and the Roman Curia. Their first reports were presented in the Synod Hall in the presence of Pope John Paul II on May 1. The proposals of these groups were later unified, consolidated and voted on, to be placed before the Holy Father for incorporation in the final document to be published after about a year. This process is done by a post-synodal commission, with three members appointed by the Holy

Father, and others selected by the synod assembly, representing the different parts of the Asian continent.

### *The Interventions*

In the first phase of the Synod at least seven interventions were exclusively concerned about social communication, especially the mass media. On the first day of the interventions (April 21) there were three presentations on communications, somehow setting the tone.

Cardinal Jaime Sin from Manila referred to Radio Veritas Asia as an example of the Church's effort to use the mass media in its evangelical mission. He further underlined the need to bring the Good News into the life of those who control and work in these media. Mass media are also "evangelized" in recognizing those which are outstanding in their human values and their exemplary life. Mass media should also propagate the local cultural expressions of faith, amplify the clamor for social justice, and promote understanding and respect between the Church and others faiths and cultures. The best and most effective form of communication for evangelization is, however, the example set by living Christian lives.

Archbishop John P. Foley, President of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, pleaded for a strong press, and expressed appreciation for the role of news agencies for sharing experiences within Asia and from Asia to others. A new tool for communication is now available through the Internet with which the message of the Church can enter directly into individual homes. *Vatican Radio* and *Radio Veritas Asia*, broadcasting in many languages to different Asian countries, can also reach people who do not have free access to the Church. Four actions are proposed for the effective presentation of the message of Christ: (1) bishops should have active communication and public relations offices; (2) they should prepare competent Catholics in the field of social communication' (3) there should be ecumenical and inter-religious co-operation to guarantee access of religion and religious values to the media and secure there respect for moral values; (4) on the national and diocesan level, bishops should develop a pastoral plan for communications and secure the communication dimension in all pastoral activities.

Bishop Ramon B. Villena from Bayombong, Philippines, reported in a very personal way about his experiences with *radio for evangelization*. Traditional ways like parishes, schools and charitable institutions are not enough any more. The most convenient and

cheapest way to reach people is the *radio*. In the same way that God gave the Roman roads to the twelve apostles, he gave today the air-waves to us. Also non-Christians are hungry for God, and the best way to reach them here and now is through radio.

Further in the course of the interventions, Bishop George Y. Phimpisan CSsR, President of the Bishops' Conference of Thailand, stated on April 23 that evangelization in Asia is more challenging today than ever, because of the revolution in communication technology and the mass media. They expand our potential to reach many more people; but the Church often fails to prioritize these opportunities. From his experience with the *Asian Christian Television (ACT)*, he concluded that we must be increasingly professional to attract the attention of ever more sophisticated audiences. Attractive programs, however, demand also higher financial outlays. Even if we would not use the mass media ourselves, our audiences are in fact affected by all kinds of messages through these media. Professional quality is needed, and a realistic interaction with the media environment in which we live and to which we offer life-giving alternatives.

On the same day Ms. Erlinda So, the General Manager of Manila-based *Radio Veritas Asia*, referred to the text on social communication in the *Instrumentum Laboris* (No.53) where the three challenges of the Church in Asia for communication should be complemented by the fourth challenge of every Christian to be a communicator as a living witness in her/his own way in the Spirit of the Acts of the Apostles, where faith was spread because of people and not technology. Modern media should uphold, defend and promote Asian values, which themselves must also be into modern ways of communicating. Only media education as media literacy, and a critical use of the media for all, can protect us from manipulation. *Radio Veritas Asia* is the "powerful means," and "represents the Church's pastoral and missionary outreach" in Asia. Bishops should not be afraid to use this instrument available to them for their pastoral and missionary endeavors.

On April 27, 1998 Ms. Annie Lam Shun-Wai, President of the East Asian Catholic Press Association (EACPA), backed up a call to support the press apostolate in China. The proclamation of the Good News in China through writings has proven to be effective. Though restricted under government censorship, the Church press in China can still produce religious books and periodicals. Besides the two officially recognized publishing houses, some dioceses also have newsletters and bulletins. Many Catholics in China are eager

to know the universal Church but access to information is difficult. There is a lack of trained editorial personnel. But radio, like *Vatican Radio* and *Radio Veritas Asia*, is of special help. In communicating with the Church in China, it is important that: (1) information be accurate, balanced and objective; (2) the language of publications and Church documents must be simple; (3) the reprinting of selected materials and translations of foreign literature on religious formation and spirituality are needed, especially for sisters and laity engaged in teaching catechism.

Beside these interventions exclusively devoted to social communication or mass media, some others touched on these or related concerns. Fr. Henry Barlage, SVD, the Superior General of the Divine Word Missionaries, referred in his intervention for China to the need for affordable Bibles, and asked that great attention be given to the apostolate of the press, with generous Church investment in the printed word and communications, including communications in the Chinese language on the Internet. Also translation projects should be supported.

Several other interventions underlined the need for the FABC triple dialogue with the poor, cultures and other religions. Some presentations underlined the *witness of life* as the best way of communicating in Asia. Not all bishops and representatives from national or professional communication offices, however, dwelt on this field of their professional responsibilities. Their interventions often had other concerns, without touching the communications dimension.

### *The "Circuli Minores"*

At least half of the "*Circuli Minores*," the small discussion groups and workshops which followed the interventions, and were composed of participants from different parts of Asia and the Roman Curia, referred to the importance of social communication in the Asian context, considering especially the ways of evangelizing, and the three-fold dialogue with the people, culture and religions in Asia.

Thus, the *French Group A* (reporter: Bishop Reinhard Marx) insisted that the "cultural context be taken into account and be reflected in certain means of communication." *English Group B* (Reporter: Bishop Arturo Bastes, SVD) stated that "'creative' ways of announcing the Gospel are those inspired by the Holy Spirit, such as ... the use of the media of social communication." *English Group E* (reporter: Bishop Francisco F. Claver, SJ) insisted that "more cre-

ative ways of proclaiming the Gospel have to be found. The use of the modern media of communication is encouraged, but also those traditional ones, like puppetry, street drama, songs, mimes, etc." *English Group H* (reporter: Bishop Jacob Mananodath) said that "the creative ways of announcing the Gospel were suggested by a life of witnessing, direct proclamation of the Word of God, the means of communication, such as radio, TV, Asian art and culture, comics, etc. In communicating the Word, signs and symbols, stories and images that are familiar to the Asian mind are to be used."

The most elaborate discussion of the communication topic seems to be the one of *English Group D* (reporter: Bishop Ramon B. Villena). For Asia, the group said that "the presentation of Jesus should begin with stories and parables. Jesus should be presented in ways understandable to Asian peoples ... Jesus can be presented as the fulfillment of the yearnings expressed in the mythologies and folklore of Asian people." Effective proclamation demands first, to "show ourselves as people of holiness ... The uniqueness of Christ is not theoretical or doctrinal, but something lived ..." But "proclamation is not only living the Gospel but also preaching, so that people are healed and made whole. Christ can be proclaimed effectively through Eucharistic adoration. Time spent in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament can help greatly in sanctifying and converting people."

The group presented a list of "ways suggested for creatively announcing Christ," which includes:

- the use of radio, films, video, Internet;
- presenting doctrine in popular song and dance;
- use of puppets, shadow plays and pantomime;
- use of stories, including those taken from ancient Hindu tales;
- dramatizing the Gospels, in which people themselves act out Gospel passages;
- reading the Bible to people while they work;
- signs on churches welcoming people, and informing them of times of worship;
- mastering marketing techniques proven successful by American evangelists;
- charismatic movement, retreats, prayer meetings, novenas, pilgrimages, open-air masses;
- *Asian Integral Pastoral Approach* (AsIPA), Basic Ecclesial Communities, Gospel and Bible sharing;
- Teledramas and Bible classes for youth;
- Public prayer of the Office and the Angelus in churches; ...

The group further asks for a meaningful liturgy to be enriched through popular religiosity, and to develop the church as a "communion of communities."

As a result of the interventions and the "Circuli Minores" discussions, some propositions and recommendations on social communication emerged "for a more effective presentation of the message of Christ and his Church," which include the following points (which do not seem to cover fully the richness and nuances of many interventions):

- To have active communications and 'Public Relations' offices in every diocese.
- To secure the formation of priests, seminarians, religious and lay professionals in social communication.
- To provide media education and parishes in Catholic schools for the critical use of the communications' media.
- Seek ecumenical and interreligious co-operation in bringing religious values into the media; and to secure in the communications media respect for the moral values of Asian cultures and religions.
- Pastoral plans must be developed by the bishops' conference and at diocesan levels.
- The use of alternative means of communication, especially those emanating from Asian cultures, should be studied and encouraged.

Several interventions and workshop reports emphasized the role of FABC's *Radio Veritas Asia* as the only Catholic short-wave radio station in Asia. This is reflected in a proposition to support further this initiative of almost 30 years, through contributions to appropriate language programming, personnel and financial help from episcopal conferences and dioceses in Asia. The assistance of funding agencies is gratefully acknowledged; and the continued support for this evangelization initiative is requested.

### **The Final Message**

At the end of the Synod the participants published a Message where they call their "coming together, for the first time, from all parts of Asia ... a unique experience and foundational event upon which our particular Churches could be built." Communication dimensions of the Asian Church surface many times in the text of this message:

- The understanding of Mission, "that all may have life and have it abundantly (cf. Jn 10:10)," has "its source in the Blessed



- Trinity." This life is *communicated* to us by Jesus, the Son of God, sent to save all humankind from Sin, Evil and Death... "
- "Therefore the *Word of God* should have central place in our lives and should nourish us spiritually ..."
- "All Christians have the duty to proclaim Christ ... " *"Many creative ways, in consonance with Asian cultures, were suggested to present Jesus to our sisters and brothers ... "*
  - "We are all aware that the Liturgy has a key role in evangelization. It is an event where people may *touch* God and *experience* Him as the one who takes the initiative to *meet* them. This *evokes our response* in adoration, contemplation and *silence*. For this, however, the liturgy must be *participatory*. *The gestures* should convey that something solemn and holy is happening ... "
  - "...The Church in Asia is called upon to enter a triple *dialogue: a dialogue with the cultures of Asia, a dialogue with the religions of Asia, and a dialogue with the peoples of Asia, especially the poor*. To carry on such a dialogue, formation for dialogue is all-important, especially in our formation centers."

The final message refers in a special section to social communication concerns in Asia in the following words:

"A pastoral plan for social communications should be made in all dioceses, so as to include a public relations office. Due attention should be paid to media education, the constructive use of the media, such as press and publications, television, radio and the Internet. The media is rightly called the modern Areopagus; and it is here, as in other fields, that the Church can play a prophetic role and, wherever necessary, become the voice of the voiceless"

The Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops has taken the challenges and possibilities of social communication quite seriously. One can only hope that the good insights and intentions are followed up by concrete steps in the near future.

## Conclusion

The presentations, deliberations and discussions at the Asian Synod related to social communication lead to the following considerations:

In a continent where Christians are in most countries a small minority of one or two per cent of the total population, or

even less, the witness of life is the first and most important way of communicating. Six interventions, beside the ones quoted above on social communication, stressed in addition this point. Such a witness can be broken down to interpersonal and corporate communication:

- Every Christian must be a communicator, testifying to his faith like the early Christians in the Acts of the Apostles;
- But the Church as a community must also give such a witness of life, so that others may say, as did the early Christians: "See how they love each other" (cf. Acts 2:43ff;4:32ff). Attempts of the Church to relate in a good way to the public, especially the media, through spokespersons, *public relations* offices, etc., can only be lasting and fruitful if grounded in such a witness of life.

*Dialogue* with people, cultures and religions in Asia begins with interpersonal communication, and presupposes genuine Christian living. Such a dialogue depends less on technical means and more on the openness and the communication ability of persons and communities.

*Storytelling* is a genuine part of Asian cultures. As Jesus Christ used this way of communicating, so also Christians in Asia should not overlook this challenge. Storytelling happens, however, not only in personal and community relationships but also in and with modern means of social communication.

The *Liturgy* of the Church is a powerful way of communicating, which should also consider and incorporate the ways of communicating Asian cultures. They are also expressed very often in a powerful way through celebrations of *popular piety*.

All *traditional forms of human communication* embedded in Asian cultures must be considered and used for evangelization.

All through its history in Asia, the Church has used ways and means of social communication available at that given time. Thus, the Church very often introduced before all others printing by movable type during the 16th and 17th centuries. *Press and periodicals* still have today their importance, especially in countries where electronic media are not accessible. Books and printed materials are needed for catechizing, teaching and formation, as well as internal operations.

For the Church, *Radio* is a special powerful means of communication. It is used at the continental level by our own Radio Veritas, and in some countries also through local and national stations and/or programming. Radio can reach people in remote, otherwise inaccessible, areas; and communicates also with those many who are not yet literate.

After our experience in Thailand with the Asian Christian Television (ACT), the Church should not be hesitant to enter into *television and satellite communication*. There is no need to own the technology, but experience should be gained; and we can be ready for production and co-operation opportunities.

More and more today, life and societies in Asia are also determined by the *modern means of social communication*, like their mass media, Internet, and other new technologies. This modern *market place (Areopagus)* very often becomes, especially for the young, the main "means of information and education, of guidance and inspiration" (*Redemptoris Missio*). Therefore, the Church must seriously consider how to integrate the Gospel message into such new opportunities, and how to train and support Christians working in these communication fields. Proper *media education* should be considered a must in the formation of young people in families and learning institutions.

Proper *communication within the Church and with the outside* needs a well-planned and structured approach, which includes the communication dimension in all pastoral and evangelizing ministries. Therefore, proper *pastoral planning* must be developed and supported through sufficient personnel, facilities and finances.

The *Inter Mirifica* document on social communication by the Second Vatican Council has already insisted on the urgency of the *proper training of priests, seminarians, religious and lay people*. This need is even more urgent today in Asia where societies change, not only through economics but also in a powerful way through the media. If the Church wants to use the modern means of social communication, what is needed first and foremost are evangelizers who are properly trained and also professionally sound in communication.

In Asian countries where the Church is not free, the special assistance and solidarity of other Asian Churches are needed. Such a support is expressed in their support of *Radio Veritas Asia* and similar initiatives, through which people in such countries can be reached

by airwaves; and through providing literature and other means for their information, of moral and spiritual support.

The growing understanding of *communication having a theological principle* beyond mere technical means; and is an essential activity of the Asian church in evangelizing and caring as a "community of communities," thus being a continuation of God's communicating revelation and incarnation, must be appreciated. It brings a deeper understanding of social communication as an essential dimension of the Church's ministry; and transcends a notion of mere instrumentality, which has been dominating our understanding for far too long.

## II. SOCIAL COMMUNICATION IN *ECCLESIA IN ASIA* AND RECENT FABC DOCUMENTS by FRANZ-JOSEF EILERS, SVD

The Synod of Bishops, the Special Assembly for Asia, took place in Rome from April 19 to May 14, 1998, with some 260 participants. The Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* was published as the final document of the Synod by Pope John Paul II in New Delhi, on November 6, 1999. Like in other continental Synod documents, for Africa (1995), or the one for America (1999), this exhortation also refers several times to social communication in the Asian continent.

Similar to sections in the *Lineamenta* (L), the first document in the preparation for a synod, and the '*Instrumentum Laboris*' (IL), the second and the immediate working paper for the synod, the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* also speaks in different situations, directly or indirectly, about social communication.

### 1. *The Mass Media as a Threat to Culture*

1.1 The threat of social communication, especially the mass media, is presented in the beginning of the document under "Asian realities" (No.7). After describing the rapid changes taking place in Asian societies, like economic development, urbanization, migration, tourism and population growth, the "overexposure to the mass media is mentioned as the first "external influence" bearing on Asian cultures. Here, the negative influence is underlined, without totally denying positive possibilities, which often times are outweighed "by the way they are controlled and used by those with questionable political, economic and ideological interests." Mass media, thus, are

seen as "threatening traditional values," especially "the sacredness of marriage" and the stability of the family, and promoting "violence, hedonism, unbridled individualism, and materialism." These threatening "new forms of behavior" are seen as posing a great challenge to the Church and the proclamation of her message. Other areas of "external influences" mentioned after this are poverty and the exploitation of people. But since this is only a description at the beginning of the document, there are no further more detailed considerations how these "great challenges" for the Church can be taken up.

Sections in the *Lineamenta* (No.5) and *Instrumentum Laboris* (No.9) of the Asian Synod show a similar line of thinking. In fact, the sentence on violence, hedonism, etc., is partly taken verbatim from the *Instrumentum Laboris* referring to answers from bishops' conferences to the *Lineamenta*.

The full text of this section reads:

A number of Synod Fathers underlined the external influences being brought to bear on Asian cultures. New forms of behavior are emerging as a result of overexposure to the mass media and the kinds of literature, music and films that are proliferating on the continent. Without denying that the means of social communication can be a great force for the good, we cannot disregard the negative impact which they often have. The beneficial effects at times may be outweighed by the way in which they are controlled and used by those with questionable political, economic and ideological interests. As a result, the negative aspects of the media and entertainment industries are threatening traditional values, and in particular, the sacredness of marriage and the stability of the family. The effect of images of violence, hedonism, unbridled individualism and materialism is striking at the heart of Asian cultures, at the religious character of the people, families and whole societies'(IL 9). This is a situation which poses a great challenge to the Church and to the proclamation of her message.

1.2 But it is not only in the "Asian realities" of *Ecclesia in Asia* where the influence of mass media is mentioned. Also in the section on the dignity of the human person (No.33) the "intrusiveness of the mass media" is listed as one of the "degrading forms of exploitation and manipulation which make them veritable slaves to those who

are powerful." This reference is taken from the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (1988).

1.3 The mass media are once again seen as contributing to a cultural globalization "which is quickly drawing Asian societies into a global consumer culture that is both secularist and materialistic. The result is an eroding of traditional family and social values which until now had sustained people and societies..." (No.39).

1.4 From this follows that "the ethical and moral aspects of globalization need to be more directly addressed." *Ecclesia in Asia* insists upon the need for "globalization without marginalization" (No. 39). In such a scenario, however, 'being Asian' is best discovered and affirmed not in confrontation and opposition, but in a spirit of complementarity and harmony. In this framework the Church can *communicate* the Gospel in a way which is faithful both to her own tradition and to the Asian soul" (No.6). Here are special challenges for Christian communicators also in view of the many young people of Asia. Some of these are listed in the 'Final Considerations' of the "FABC-OSC Bishops' Meet 1999" on *Megatrends Asia: Communication Trends for the Church?* in a more detailed way, like the following:

- In a more and more market-oriented environment, Christian communication should continue to highlight the plight of the poor, the marginalized, minorities, indigenous cultures, migrant workers, etc. They should treasure the values of dying cultures and help them to survive (4.1).

- Christian media need to be the "voice of the voiceless." Since privatized communication enterprises very often ignore the marginalized, we should have courage to highlight their situation and needs (4.2).

- Christian communication should show the value of traditions but at the same time also help to discern new developments (8.1).

- Young people, especially in cities, grow up with the latest communication equipment. Church leaders should be aware of the importance and possibilities of modern communication technologies for their communities, especially their young members, and take up these challenges (6.2).

- Young people especially need guidance in a more diversified society. Christian communicators should be their companions and guides, and not interested only in material or financial gain from their operations (8.2).

- The growing gap between different ages and cultural groups needs to be bridged through proper dialogue and communication (3.4)

## 2. *Social Communication in and for Asia*

2.1 The special section on Social Communication in *Ecclesia in Asia* (No. 48) begins again with a reference to globalization, quoting from Pope John Paul II's encyclical letter on mission *Redemptoris Missio* (1990, 37c), about the role of the means of social communication in the globalization process. They have become so important as to be for many the chief means of information and education, of guidance and inspiration in their behavior as individuals, families and within society at large. In particular, the younger generation is growing up in a world conditioned by the mass media." Further, building on *Redemptoris Missio*, the exhortation confirms the emergence of a *new culture*, which originates not only from a new content but also from "*new ways of communicating* with new languages, new technologies and a new psychology." The exceptional role played by the means of social communication in shaping the world, its cultures and ways of thinking has led to rapid and far-reaching changes in Asian societies."

2.2 After this general description of an emerging new communications-dominated culture in Asia, the exhortation also addresses the changes which this brings for the *evangelizing mission of the Church*:

- The modern means of communication "assist greatly in the proclamation of the Gospel to every corner of the continent because of their ever-increasing influence, even in remote areas of Asia."
- This message of the Gospel to be spread by the media must, however, be integrated into the *new culture* created by modern communication; "and it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teachings" (RM 37).
- This demands from the Church to "explore ways of thoroughly integrating the mass media into her pastoral planning and activity, so that by their effective use the Gospel's power can reach out still further to individuals and peoples and entire peoples, and infuse Asian cultures with the values of the Kingdom."

Together with a general remark on the importance of *radio* and publications the FABC ("Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences")-operated *Radio Veritas Asia* is commended as "the only continent-wide radio station for the Church in Asia." The Pope, together with the Synod Fathers, demands: "Efforts must be made to strengthen this excellent instrument of mission, through appropriate

language programming, personnel and financial help from episcopal conferences and dioceses in Asia."

The role of *Catholic publications and news agencies* is seen as helping:

- a) "to disseminate information, and
- b) offer continuing religious education and formation,
- c) sustaining and nurturing a sense of Catholic identity,
- d) spreading knowledge of Catholic moral principles."

2.3 For an *evangelization through social communication and human promotion*, without going further into detail the Pope lists the following recommendations based on proposals of the Synod Fathers:

- Each diocese should have "where possible, a communications and media office."
- Media education, "including the critical evaluation of media output, needs to be an increasing part of the formation of priests, seminarians, religious, catechists, lay professionals, students in Catholic schools and parish communities."
- Ecumenical and inter-religious co-operation is needed, "given the wide influence and extraordinary impact of the mass media, to ensure a place for spiritual and moral values in the media."
- The development of pastoral plans for communications "at the diocesan and national levels," following the indications of the Pastoral Instruction *Aetatis Novae* is encouraged. They must, however, pay "appropriate attention to the circumstances prevailing in Asia."

This special section on Social Communication in *Ecclesia in Asia* brings nothing new beyond what has been said already several times in other pontifical documents of the past. But it summarizes some important points which are considered as especially relevant to Asia. All this is based on the view of *Redemptoris Missio* (1999, No. 37c), which sees the world of communication as the "first Areopagus of the modern age." This *new culture*, which "originates not just from whatever content is eventually expressed, but from the very fact that there exist new ways of communicating, with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology," grows also rapidly in Asia, and is shaping especially the life of young people, who comprise more than 50% of the Asian population. What still remains to be done is to study the "far-reaching changes" of this *new culture* created by modern technologies. The "evangelizing mission" of the Church in Asia can only be fully integrated into such developments if Church leaders, and those responsible for social communication,



become fully aware of this new situation with new possibilities and challenges.

Within the overall arrangement of this section on social communication in the outline of *Ecclesia in Asia*, one may be astonished to find it in the last chapter (VII) of the document, under "Witnesses to the Gospel." All other parts of this section talk about people as witnesses, like the witnessing Church, pastors, religious, laity, family, young people and the martyrs, whereas social communication is more an activity and situation which for no clear reason is now placed between young people and the martyrs. It seems that the editors were somehow at a loss where to place this important activity of the Church, which would have gone well also in chapters V and VI on "Communion and Dialogue for Mission," or "the service of human promotion." In *Ecclesia in America*, the Apostolic Exhortation after the Synod on America, (January 22, 1999), the media are placed in the chapter about "new evangelization," together with activities like catechesis, evangelization of culture and education, as "evangelizing through the media" (No.72).

The full text of this chapter reads:

48. In an era of globalization, the means of social communication have become so important as to be for many the chief means of information and education, of guidance and inspiration in their behavior as individuals, families, and within society at large. In particular, the younger generation is growing up in a world conditioned by the mass media" (John Paul II: *Redemptoris Missio*, 37c). The world is seeing the emergence of a new culture that 'originates not just from whatever content is eventually expressed, but from the very fact that there exist new ways of communicating, with new languages, new technologies and a new psychology' (*ibid.*). The exceptional role played by the means of social communication in shaping the world, its cultures and ways of thinking has led to rapid and far-reaching changes in Asian societies.

Inevitably, the Church's evangelizing mission too is deeply affected by the impact of the mass media. Since the mass media have an ever-increasing influence even in remote areas of Asia, they can assist greatly in the proclamation of the Gospel to every corner of the continent. However, "it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teaching.

It is necessary to integrate that message into the "new culture" created by modern communications" (*ibid.*). To this end, the Church needs to explore ways of thoroughly integrating the mass media into her pastoral planning and activity, so that by their effective use the Gospel's power can reach out still further to individuals and entire peoples, and infuse Asian cultures with the values of the Kingdom.

I echo the Synod Father commendation of *Radio Veritas Asia*, the only continent-wide radio station for the Church in Asia, for its almost thirty years of evangelization through broadcasting. Efforts must be made to strengthen this excellent instrument of mission, through appropriate language programming, personnel and financial help from episcopal conferences and dioceses in Asia (*Propositio 45*). In addition to radio, Catholic publications and news agencies can help to disseminate information, and offer continuing religious education and formation throughout the continent. In places where Christians are a minority, these can be an important means of sustaining and nurturing a sense of Catholic identity and of spreading knowledge of Catholic moral principles (*ibid.*).

I take up the recommendations of the Synod Fathers on the point of evangelization through social communications, the "Areopagus of the modern age," in the hope that it may serve human promotion and the spreading of the truth of Christ and the teaching of the Church (*ibid.*). It would help if each diocese would establish, where possible, a communications and media office. Media education, including the critical evaluation of media output, needs to be an increasing part of the formation of priests, seminarians, religious, catechists, lay professionals, students in Catholic schools and parish communities. Given the wide influence and extraordinary impact of the mass media, Catholics need to work with the members of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, and with the followers of other religions, to ensure a place for spiritual and moral values in the media. With the Synod Fathers, I encourage the development of pastoral plans for communications at the national and diocesan levels, following the indications of the Pastoral Instruction *Aetatis Novae*, with appropriate attention to the circumstances prevailing in Asia.

### 3. *The Social Communication Dimension in Asian Church Activities*

Besides those sections more exclusively referring to social communication and the media there are some considerations with consequences, and related to a broader view of social communication for the Church in Asia.

3.1 Essential elements of a *communication theology* are the Trinitarian God, communicating within himself but also revealing himself through creation and grace, finally becoming one of us in the Word becoming flesh (Jn 1.14). The theological foundations of *Ecclesia in Asia* go in the same direction when the document says of the *Trinity* that "we cannot isolate or separate one person from the other, since each is revealed only within the communion" — communication — "of life and action of the Trinity. The saving action of Jesus has its origin in the communion" — communication — "of the Godhead, and opens the way for all who believe in him to enter into intimate communion" — communication — "with the Trinity and with one another" (No.12).

God's *revelation* is carried out on the two levels of creation and grace. In the *Ecclesia in Asia* understanding, "*creation* is God's free *communication* of love, a *communication* which, out of nothing, brings everything into being" (No.15).

In *grace* Jesus "as the Father's definite word makes God and his saving will known in the fullest way possible." *Ecclesia in Asia* describes his mission as the *perfect communicator* (*Communio et Progressio*, No.11) in stating: "The mission of Jesus not only restored communion" — communication — "between God and humanity, it also established a new communion" — communication — "between human beings alienated from one another because of sin" (No.13). He re-establishes, as Carlo Martini says (1996, 33), the communication line between God and people and between themselves. "In all that he said and did, Jesus was the Father's voice, hand and arms, gathering all God's children into a family of love ... Sent by the God of "communion" — communication — "and being truly God and truly man, Jesus established communion" — communication — "between heaven and earth in his very person" (No.13).

Finally, "even for those who do not explicitly profess faith in him as savior, salvation comes as a grace from Jesus Christ through the *communication* of the Holy Spirit" (No.14). Just as Jesus "speaks from the very heart of the human condition" (No.14), a Christian communicator must also speak from such a grounding. The mission

of the Church is to prepare "the peoples of Asia for the saving *dialogue* with the savior of all. Led by the Spirit in her mission of service and love, the Church can offer an encounter between Jesus Christ and the people of Asia" (18).

"Jesus the Savior: Proclaiming the Gift" is the title of the whole chapter IV of *Ecclesia in Asia* (Nos.19-23); and a chapter on "Communion and Dialogue for Mission" follows (Nos. 24-31). Both go hand in hand within the church, within other churches and other religions. "Only if the people of God recognize the gift that is theirs in Christ will they be able to *communicate* that gift to others through proclamation and dialogue" (No.13).

3.2 The *Ecclesia in Asia* considerations on "Proclaiming Jesus Christ in Asia" (Chapter IV, No.20) have to be seen as the obligation to communicate Christ in Asia through words and deeds. Here *as ways of communicating*, "narrative methods akin to Asian cultural forms are to be preferred"; and "the proclamation of Jesus Christ can most effectively be made by narrating his story, as the Gospels do." The Church "must be open to new and surprising ways in which the face of Jesus might be presented in Asia." This is especially recommended for the initial stage of the evangelization process, which familiarizes people in a more general way with Christianity. But also for the second step, in the catechetical instruction" an evocative pedagogy, using stories, parables and symbols, so characteristic in Asian methodology in teaching," are recommended. In such communication the evangelizer has "to take the situation of the listener to heart." Any communication must be "adapted to the listener's level of maturity, and in appropriate form and language. In this perspective, the Synod Fathers stressed many times the need to evangelize in a way that appeals to the sensibilities of Asian peoples; and they suggested images of Jesus which would be intelligible to Asian minds and cultures." Such images of Jesus could be Jesus Christ as:

- the teacher of wisdom
- the healer
- the liberator
- the spiritual guide
- the enlightened one
- the compassionate friend of the poor
- the good Samaritan
- the good shepherd
- the obedient one.

"Jesus could be presented as the incarnate wisdom of God whose grace brings to fruition the 'seeds' of Divine Wisdom already present in the lives, religions and peoples of Asia."

Christian communication has to be done according to the "cultural patterns and ways of thinking" of the Asian people, as it is exemplified in Asian mission history by persons like Giovanni de Montecorvino, Matteo Ricci and Roberto de Nobili.

3.3 The "proclamation of Jesus Christ in Asia" (No.23) cannot be fully understood and executed without a deep *communication spirituality*. Proclamation is basically communicating. This "proclaiming communication" must originate and be based on the deep-rooted "experience of God which flows from a living faith." Carlo Martini, in analyzing the constants of God's communication, writes that this "divine communication is prepared in the secret silence of God" (Carlo Martini, 1996, 36). Every Christian communication and proclamation has to start in the same way, especially in Asia. Because "mission is contemplative action and active contemplation" (EA 23), a communicator, or "a missionary, who has no deep experience with God in prayer and contemplation will have little spiritual influence or missionary success ..." In Asia "the Church is called to be a praying Church, deeply spiritual, even as she engages in immediate human and social concerns. All Christians need a true missionary spirituality of prayer and contemplation." After all "a fire can only be lit by something that is itself on fire."

Following the Asian Synod in Rome the FABC Communication bishops, in their annual meeting in November 1998, already stated: "With the many challenges being faced today, we felt that the spirituality of those involved in social communication must be re-emphasized. Such a spirituality flows out of the communication of the Holy Trinity" (*Bishops' Meet '96*). They further quote Pope John Paul II from his World Communication Day message of the same year: "Christian communicators need to be men and women of Spirit-filled prayer, entering ever more deeply into communion with God in order to grow in their ability to foster communion among their fellow human beings. They must be schooled in hope by the Holy Spirit, the principal agent of the new evangelization."

3.4 Christians who communicate Christ must embody him in their lives and this means, finally once again, the "*witness of life*" as the first means of evangelization and communication, as underlined already by Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975, No. 41). This means that Christian social communication is not only concerned with technology but, first and foremost, with the inner disposition and attitude which must be based on a deep spiritual experience of the Lord.

"Any spirituality of communication," the FABC-OSC bishops said in their "Final Considerations 1998," "is first and foremost expressed through the witness of life, which means for the communicator in Asia:

- to be a person of contemplation and prayer, similar to the missionary, whom Pope John Paul II describes as a "contemplative in action" (cf. *RM, 91*);
- have the ability to build communities through love, sharing, communion, relationship and equality;
- the content of whose communication should reflect one's spirituality rooted in the Incarnation — communicators need to be people-oriented;
- who proclaims Kingdom values amidst a society of violence, corruption and evil forces."

3.4.1 Part of a witness of life as communication is also the Christian community in celebrating the *liturgy* (No.22), which is listed in *Ecclesia in Asia* as one of the "key areas of inculturation." Since "the liturgy is the key and summit of all Christian life and mission," it is also "a decisive means of evangelization, especially in Asia, where the followers of different religions are so drawn to worship, religious festivals and popular devotions." This reality has considerable consequences and challenges for social communication.

3.4.2 Another element also listed under the key area of inculturation is the *biblical apostolate* (No.22). It is the biblical word, which has to be communicated in "passing on the message of salvation to the peoples of Asia, where the transmitted word is so important in preserving and *communicating* religious experience." The sacred text must be made "the basis of all missionary proclamation, catechesis, preaching and styles of spirituality." Here, beside others, the narrative style of many of the biblical books has a special "affinity with the religious texts typical for Asia." Christian communication has to be narrative communication, if it wants to follow God's ways of communicating. In a similar vein the "*formation of evangelizers*" demands, according to *Ecclesia in Asia*, "to adapt the formation of evangelizers to the cultural contexts of Asia," which must also hold for the training of communicators.

3.5 The FABC concern for *a new way of being Church in Asia* (No.24) is also reflected in *Ecclesia in Asia*. Referring to the Synod Fathers, the diocese is described as a "communion of communities," which are "engaged in a 'dialogue of life and heart' sustained by the grace of the Holy Spirit." The "FABC-OSC Bishops' Meet 1997" has spelled out in more detail the communication consequences of

such an approach, which demanded of the bishops, e.g., "to create a new style of leadership which is enabling and facilitating, being real leaders and not mere followers." *Ecclesia in Asia* sees in such a "communion of communities" the "clergy, consecrated persons and the laity" "engaged in a dialogue of life and heart." The FABC communication bishops underlined that "the laity must be heard louder and clearer. The marginalized and the poor too have a voice to be recognized in the Church."

With the Synod Fathers *Ecclesia in Asia* sees as the result of a "communion of communities" to be a "**participatory church**" "in which all live their proper vocation and perform their proper role." In order to build up the "communion for mission" and the "mission of communion," every member's unique charism needs to be acknowledged, developed and effectively utilized" (No.25). The FABC communication bishops expressed in 1997 a similar concern when they demanded a "communication that encourages co-responsibility at all levels, both vertically and horizontally. We have to find mechanisms to bring about effectively this communication."

3.6 It is also the vocation of *lay people* (no. 45) to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They are called missionaries in their proper area of profession, in "politics, economics, industry, education, **the media**, science, technology, the arts and sports." They are "serving as true missionaries, reaching out to fellow Asians who might never have contact with clergy or religious." *Ecclesia in Asia* sees it as "the task of pastors to ensure that the laity are formed as evangelizers able to face the challenges of the contemporary world." This reminds one of the pastoral priorities and challenges of the Pastoral Instruction *Aetatis Novae* (1992, No.19): "to develop and offer programs of pastoral care which are especially responsive to the peculiar working conditions and moral challenges facing communication professionals."

3.7 The "deep thirst for spiritual values," especially by the *young people* in Asia, is already mentioned right at the outset of *Ecclesia in Asia* (No.7) in speaking of Asian cultural and religious values. These young people very often do not grow up any longer in their traditions, but in options, as the FABC-OSC bishops said in their 'Meet' 1999. Referring to this section of *Ecclesia in Asia*, they find that the former traditions are "very often substituted for through different options available to the individual and community in a growing globalization, which is not only economic but also cultural"; and "made possible by the modern communications media." Such a cultural globalization, *Ecclesia in Asia* states, "is quickly drawing

Asian societies into a global consumer culture that is both secularistic and materialistic," and eroding "traditional family values, which until now had sustained peoples and societies."

3.8 Among the listing of positive Church movements in Asia are also "associations and ecclesial movements devoted to the *promotion of human dignity and justice*," which make "accessible and tangible the universality of the evangelical message of our adoption as children of God" (No.9). This dignity and integrity of the human person, "created in the image of God," are taken up in more detail later in *Ecclesia in Asia* (No.33), where also the "intrusiveness of the mass media" is mentioned. This brings it about that, even 50 years after the declaration of human rights, "many people are still subjected to the most degrading forms of exploitation and manipulation, which make them veritable slaves to those who are more powerful, to an ideology, economic power, oppressive political systems, scientific technocracy..." As special groups exposed to such exploitation, and being in the special care of the Church, *Ecclesia in Asia* lists among others: migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, aboriginal populations, children and women. These are groups of the Asian population which have been also the special concern of the FABC, as declared in the final statements of the 6th and 7th Plenary Assemblies in Manila (1995) and Samphran, Thailand (2000). They should be, as well, of special concern to the Church's communication in the defense of their human rights.

#### **4. *The Final Statement of the 7th FABC Plenary Assembly***

The vision of social communication contained in *Ecclesia in Asia* is basically repeated in the final statement of the 7th Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), January 3-12, 2000, in Samphran, Thailand, which convened two months after the publication of *Ecclesia in Asia*.

4.1 In the FABC's "*Vision of Renewal*" the Church is described as moving towards the poor and young, and being on the side of the multitudes. A Church "incarnate in a people" (I, A,2), and being an "authentic community of faith" (I,A,4), can only be a communicating Church in word and deed. "To be attentive and open to the mysterious stirrings of the Spirit in the realities of Asia and of the Church" (I,B) is an essential prerequisite of any communication. From such a holistic spirituality flows a missionary engagement and the ability, to "tell the story of Jesus and announce his gift of new life to our Asian world of lights and shadows."



The primacy of the Spirit is once again invoked for the formation program of the Church in its "practical directions" (III,C,2), as well as for its "witness of life": "Asian people will recognize the Gospel that we announce, when they see in our life the transparency of the message of Jesus, and the inspiring and healing figure of men and women immersed in God" (III,C,1).

4.2 The "*oversaturation of the mass media*," as it contributes to the *cultural globalization*, is mentioned in the first part of the section on "issues and challenges in the mission of love and service," which refers to the overall theme of the assembly. Quoting *Ecclesia in Asia* (No.7), the text repeats that such an oversaturation draws Asian societies into "a global consumer-culture that is both secularist and materialistic" (II,A). The ethical and moral issues from such a development especially cannot be ignored.

4.3 In "*the challenge of discerning the Asian way*" (Part III) it is no longer the individual issues, like evangelization, inculturation, etc., which are repeated and considered; but they are seen now "but aspects of an integrated approach to our mission of love and service." The Church needs to feel and act "integrally" also in her communication activities. "Only by the 'inner authority' of authentic lives, founded on a deep spirituality, will we become credible instruments of transformation." Also communication in Asia must be on the level of depth, rather than on the level of ideas and action." "Only in this framework 'of complementarity and harmony; can the Church *communicate* the Gospel in a way which is faithful both to her own tradition and the Asian soul" (EA, No. 6). The need for "a credible and integrated approach" is repeated by the bishops later in the "thrust of our response" (III,B). It must always be "involving the other person or community."

4.4 First in the spelling out of the "*pastoral concerns*" (III,A) of the FABC Statement are the *young*, the majority of Asia's population. "The swift and drastic changes taking place in our world—globalization, political changes and the *media explosion*—radically affect the lives of the youth in every part of Asia." Because of this the Church has to journey with the youth, seeing them rather "as resources and not problems." "Only when the youth are recognized as agents and co-workers of the evangelizing mission of the Church will their full potential blossom" (III,A,1). Other pastoral concerns refer to women, family, indigenous people, migrants and refugees.

4.5 Under the "*practical directions*" of the document the mass media and new information technologies are listed as deeply af-

fecting "the Church's evangelizing mission." At the same time the potential of these means "in the proclamation of the Gospel to every corner of the continent" is underlined. The operations of *Radio Veritas Asia* are given as a concrete example.

The demand of John Paul II's encyclical letter on mission, *Redemptoris Missio*, to integrate the Church's message into the *new culture* created by modern communication (RM, 37c, EA, 48) is repeated but not further developed. The full text of this section (III,c,3) reads:

3. The Church's evangelizing mission is deeply affected by the impact of the *mass media* and new information technologies. Nevertheless, the media can assist greatly in the proclamation of the Gospel to every corner of the continent, as it is done now by the FABC initiative, Radio Veritas Asia. However, it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teaching. It is necessary to integrate that message into the "new culture" created by modern communications (EA, 48).

It is up to the Asian communicators to en flesh this short statement with concrete proposals and action. Some steps in this direction have been made already in the past years by the different initiatives of the FABC Office of Social Communication in its annual meetings of the communication bishops ("FABC-OSC Bishops' Meet") and other conferences on specialized themes, like the "Bishops' Institute for Social Communication" (BISCOM). But still more has to be done. This probably should include deeper study and research, e.g.,:

- the impact of modern communications means, mass media and multimedia on young people and Asian societies at large;
- the creative use of these means for evangelization also at the diocesan level, and in basic Christian communities;
- a better and more systematic application of media/communication education at different levels;
- the ethics and moral implications of modern communication in Asia, especially in relation to globalization, family, justice and peace, environment, migrants and minorities;
- the social communication formation of Church people, especially seminarians, priests, religious, but also of interested and capable young people with Church involvement.

Practical training and social communication formation must be based on a solid analysis of the situations, needs and possibilities.

Do we really have enough qualified people for this? Social communication application and involvement need long-range planning, and should go beyond short-term initiatives, without losing the necessary flexibility for new developments and opportunities.

### Sources

John Paul II,

- Encyclical Letter on Mission, *Redemptoris Missio*, December 7, 1990.
- Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*, January 22, 1999.
- Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, November 6, 1999.

FABC Papers

- No. 93: *A Renewed Church in Asia: Mission of Love and Service*, Final Statement of the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, Samphran, Thailand, January 3-12, 2000.
- No. 85: *Church and Social Communication in Asia*, Third Edition, (Enlarged and Revised), February 2000.
- Carlo Martini: *Communicating Christ to the World*. The Pastoral Letters "Ephata, Be Opened!", "The Hem of His Garment", and "Letters to a Family about TV", 1994 Philippine Edition, Manila, 1996.
- Franz-Josef Eilers, svd: *Communicating in Community*, An Introduction to Social Communication, 2nd Edition, Manila, 1994: "Theological Aspects of Communication," (pp.32- 48).

### III. CONSULTATION ON EVANGELIZATION AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATION CHENNAI, INDIA JULY 4-8, 1999

#### Orientations and Recommendations

We, the Church persons involved in evangelization and social communication, met at Chennai, India, on July 4 - 8, 1999, to discern and seek ways by which social communication can help the evangelization process in Asia. We recognize the significance of this event—*kairos*—where the Spirit has led us to value deeply the inherent link between social communication and the task of evangelization.

From our joint responsibility of evangelizing and communicat-

ing Christ we share the following orientations and recommendations:

## I. Orientations

1. We see the Church as a communion of ecclesial communities participating in the mission and ministry of Jesus. (Cf. FABC, "A New Way of Being Church in Asia.")

2. In proclaiming Jesus to the peoples of Asia, we communicate "the full truth about the human person," whose dignity is based on "being an image and likeness of God," empowered by the Spirit of Jesus for the fullness of the Father's love (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 15)

3. The human person is the basis of our dialogue with all people of good will, all religions and cultures, and especially with the poor and young people of Asia. We are committed to bring Jesus' message to all nations of Asia. Our contribution lies in the witnessing and dialogue of faith and life, Gospel and culture, Church and society.

4. The Church as a communion-in-mission has to begin by evangelizing herself, by the life and ministry of Jesus. She has to be transformed by "the full truth about the human person" (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 15). Evangelization calls for such renewal (*mission ad intra*), since the Church is a pilgrim among the Asian peoples.

5. Social communication is intimately linked with the mission of the Church, within herself (*ad intra*), and to the outside world (*ad extra*).

6. The proclamation of the Good News in Asia is based on a "triple dialogue" (FABC), with the poor, cultures and religions. This involves also all areas of human behavior, thought patterns, social and cultural dynamics, environment and modern technology.

## II. Recommendations

### 1. Sensitivity to Asian Cultures and Religions

Given the multi-religious and multi-cultural situation in Asia, we need to engage in a genuine dialogue with all people in Asia. This is possible only if prejudices are overcome; and we share in a spirit of pilgrimage, in the joys and aspirations, fears and anxieties of people.

— Interreligious dialogue is not possible without sufficient knowledge of other religions. Therefore, we should begin to instill and develop appreciation for other religions, even in our catechism classes.

— To cultivate Asian consciousness, our media centers should make sure that at least a few of their programs every year are produced with an all-Asian perspective. These (training manuals, videos, etc.) should be made in English, and in such a way that they can be used in all Asian countries.

— To ensure justice for women we should use inclusive language.

## **2. Approach towards Secular Communication**

— We should accept and appreciate at all levels the role of social communication in Asian societies.

— Even if sometimes media tend to sensationalize negative aspects, we should recognize their prophetic role.

— We "should accept and recognize professionals in communication, and develop and promote dialogue, and collaborate with them" (FABC-OSC Bishops Meet '98 6, 6).

— The Church's participation in the secular media includes submitting articles for publication and providing programs for broadcast, being available for interviews, and offering timely and accurate information when required.

— As a "communion of communities" (FABC), we should actively oppose negative portrayal of and public attacks on Catholic and other religious groups.

## **3. Social Communication for Evangelization**

To ensure effectiveness in evangelization in Asia:

— We should have our "success stories" publicized to inspire others to a life of faith.

— We should use movies, TV shows, songs and other media in religion courses, formation seminars and homilies.

— In using social communications, Church leaders should ensure that Christian communities are mission-oriented, and avoid a group-privatization of faith.

— We should provide a communication environment which is attractive to young people, such as media events, performances, special liturgies, pilgrimages, camps and others.

— We should join with other religious groups, NGOs and professionals, in conducting media campaigns which address national and social needs.

— Our media centers should produce programs aimed at perceived needs of the audience, with a sub-text of human values.

#### **4. Evangelizing Communication within the Church**

— Church documents should be user-friendly, and written in a language that can be understood by today's media-saturated society. To achieve this, the Church should involve journalists in formulating these documents.

— To guarantee effective communication, professionals must be employed and retained with competitive salaries.

— A team of crisis-management experts should be available to assist Church leaders when needed.

— Church communication centers should network among themselves and other people and NGOs to inspire and assist each other. We should make our facilities available to media people committed to human values.

— We should help bishops, priests, religious and seminarians to acquire a thorough understanding of the workings of social communication of at different levels, from homiletics to the use of modern technologies for evangelization. This requires regular training courses in formation programs.

#### **5. Conclusion**

— We, the participants of the FABC Consultation on Evangelization and Social Communication in Asia, are ready to help the Church in Asia to implement these recommendations. We are available to serve the national bishops' conferences, especially at their regular meetings.

— We thank the FABC Offices for Evangelization and for Social Communication for their joint initiative to bring us together.

### **IV. MODERN COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES: CHALLENGES FOR THE CHURCH IN ASIA? BANGKOK, THAILAND SEPTEMBER 6-11, 1999**

#### **Orientations and Recommendations**

We, the 44 bishops and other participants from ten different Asian countries, gathered in Bangkok, Thailand, from September 6 to 11, 1999 for the second "Bishops' Institute for Social Communication" (BISCOM II). Having studied and reflected on modern communication technologies as challenges for the Church in Asia, we humbly submit the following "Orientations and Recommendations"

to the bishops' conferences and associate members of the FABC for guidance, direction and action.

### Introduction

1. Good communication is essential for the success of any Church ministry. Modern communication technologies provide additional tools to accomplish this more effectively, while helping to bring about "a new way of being Church in Asia" (FABC, Bandung, 1990; FABC-OSC Bishops' Meet '97, Final Considerations).

2. Communication technologies are not just tools for organizing the Church or its activities, or for building communities of faith; but they also speak a new language, depending heavily on the interactive use of stories, images, music and sound effects, as well as text, information and data. This is becoming the preferred language of the new generation. Communication technologies are creating a new culture and are radically influencing the way we live. They have the potential of effectively bringing about mutual knowledge, understanding, familiarity, appreciation, harmony and love throughout the human community, and drawing it forward toward the Kingdom of God (cf. RM, No. 37c).

3. The local Churches in Asia have had different experiences in the use of modern communication technologies. Learning from one another, they become more open to the potential of these technologies for pastoral care and evangelization. Lessons gained from other continents, such as the RIIAL (*Red Informativa de la Iglesia en America Latina*, the computer network of the Church in Latin America), experience and reinforce these challenges. BISCOP II delegates note the growing presence of new communication technologies (NCTs) in schools, parishes and church offices.

4. The new media urge the Churches of Asia to be more interactive among themselves and with the outside.

5. The effects of NCTs are wide-ranging. Any kind of information is available at the click of a "mouse," and offers opportunities to broaden the horizon. Differences between race, religion or culture can be reduced by the democratic use of the Internet. Distances and times are shrinking. Interaction and dialogue foster communion and community. However, the global nature of the NCTs can also threaten local cultures and communities.

## Orientations

1. NCTs are emerging tools or means for processing and dissemination of information. They combine the use of computer, telecommunications and television; develop digital language and new ways of transmission, such as satellite, fiber optics and cable. They give new opportunities and challenges to the Church in Asia.

2. NCTs create a new vocabulary and new relationships, via Internet, e-mail, websites and other technologies, which the Church cannot neglect.

3. NCTs can greatly increase communication within the Church (*ad intra*) through e-mail, Internet, chat rooms and an ongoing flow of information, ideas and experiences. They can help connect communities and individuals in a more intimate way; and can be an effective instrument for pastoral care.

4. For the communication of the Church with the outside (*ad extra*) NCTs can help to improve her contact with the general public. They open additional new missionary frontiers for evangelization in developing *cyber missionaries* and relevant programs. Their possibilities for distance education should be explored.

5. "We are not to lose sight of the truth that it is the person and not the technology that is the best means of communication, especially in Asian cultures" (FABC-OSC Bishops' Meet 1996, Final Considerations). Despite the new communication technologies, we should not forget that it is people who matter most. NCTs must help, not enslave them. Personal relationships, a warm smile, time for one another are still important. The advent of NCTs should not undermine or diminish *human* and traditional means of communication.

6. NCTs demand in a special way teamwork and mutual co-operation.

7. Since NCTs diminish boundaries, distances and regulations, there is a special need to develop a sense of responsibility, commitment to proper ethics, and an appropriate spirituality.

## Recommendations

1. Church communities should identify talents and develop dedicated teams at the parish, diocesan and national levels. They should network with each other and profit from experiences in other parts



of the world, like Latin America (RIIAL).

2. NCTs demand a fresh approach to formation and training of media practitioners and consumers. They require a proper introduction and continual updating of bishops, priests, seminarians, religious and lay people with Church responsibilities.

In her education formation the Church should empower all media consumers, especially the young, in the proper use of NCTs.

Priests, seminarians, religious and lay people should be trained as cyber-missionaries to utilize fully NCTs for evangelization. The expertise of professionals for such formation should be invited.

3. Since the journalists are no longer the only ones to select and present information, any Internet user becomes his own journalist, and must learn how to handle and select from the information overflow in the web. This calls for a special effort of the Church especially in her pastoral and educational apostolate.

4. Learning from others' experiences and joining forces demand a close co-operation between all who are committed and working with NCTs for the Church. We recommend the development of technical and program consultancies beyond national and continental borders.

5. Parishes, dioceses, religious organizations and bishops' conferences are encouraged to be connected by e-mail and develop their own webpages. The webpages should be simple but informative and must be updated regularly. As much as possible, they should be interactive, visually attractive, and foster dialogue with different peoples, cultures and religions. FABC links with other Asian bishops' conferences and Church networks should be provided.

6. Radio Veritas Asia, "The Missionary Voice of the Church in Asia," gains through NCTs an added importance beyond mere short-wave transmission. These technologies, including satellites, open new possibilities for Internet programming and localized transmissions.

7. The different offices of the FABC should develop closer co-operation among themselves in using NCTs for their programs and activities. The further development and support for the FABC website ([www.fabc.org.ph](http://www.fabc.org.ph)) is recommended.

V. SOCIAL COMMUNICATION FORMATION  
IN PRIESTLY MINISTRY AND MISSION  
SAMPHRAN, THAILAND MAY 7-12, 2001

**Final Considerations**

We, 43 participants of BISCOP III, bishops, formators and communication animators involved in priestly formation in Asia, met at Samphran, Thailand, from May 7 to 12, 2001, to study and discuss how social communication formation can help priestly ministry and mission in Asia. We fully realize and understand the urgent need for social communication formation of formators, pastors and seminarians, as also for training in some skills for the use of communication technology, in both formation and mission.

The Second Vatican Council (*Inter Mirifica*, No. 3) declares that "it is the Church's birthright to use and own any of these media which are necessary or useful for the formation of Christians and for pastoral activity."

All communication begins with God's self-communication, as the Triune God desires to share the divine communion with us through the mysteries of creation and redemption. Created in the image of God, we humans participate in God's self-communication, especially the communication of the Good News of Jesus, who is the fullness of God's self-revelation. This motivates all and calls us to a genuine communication. The desire to share in God's creative action and self-communication impels us to embrace communication as integral to theology and to priestly formation.

Jesus Christ, as the "perfect communicator" (*Communio et Progressio*, No. 11), is the model for all Christian communication. "Christian communicators need to be men and women of Spirit-filled prayer, entering ever more deeply into communion with God in order to grow in their ability to foster communion among their fellow human beings. They must be schooled in hope by the Holy Spirit, the principal agent of the new evangelization (TMA, No. 45) ..." (John Paul II, Message World Communication Day, 1998). (Cf. Bishops' Meet '98, No. 1.)

Communication is the soul of the apostolate, as all are called to communicate the Good News to the ends of the earth. In our age and time, communication media have reached a high level of effectiveness. The Church cannot lag behind in the use of the media for mission. Fully conscious of the Church's responsibility for this, we

present the following orientations and recommendations.

## **Orientations**

### **1. Bishops**

1.1 Fully aware of the demands made in Church documents, bishops should encourage both priests, and in particular formators, to follow the guidance given in these documents.

1.2 As leaders of their dioceses, bishops should promote an integral social communication formation for priests and seminarians.

1.3 They should take care that courses in social communication are introduced in the seminary.

1.4 Bishops should promote and foster a greater media exposure for seminarians.

### **2. Formators and Animators**

2.1 Any formation in social communication must start with contemplation and prayer, because before we "do," we must "be" (NMI, No. 15), as Jesus based his whole mission on communing with the Father.

2.2 Given the media milieu today, seminary formators and teachers should accompany the students through participation in their daily journey of life.

2.3 They should be models of good communication, both among themselves and with students.

2.4 Understanding the language of the "e-generation," they need to teach in a given style suited to the perception of the students.

### **3. Seminarians**

3.1 Seminarians should be familiar with the Church documents and structures of social communication.

3.2 They must have a keen desire to be effective communicators by being authentically human, keeping in touch with local culture and the language of the times.

3.3 They must be able to become critical consumers of the media, assist others to become more sensitive to value distortion in society, and be able to respond accordingly.

3.4 With *Communio et Progressio*, they should be convinced that "if students for the priesthood and religious in training wish to be part of modern life; and also to be at all effective in their apostolate; they should know how the media work upon the fabric of society, and also the technique of their use. This knowledge should be an integral part of their ordinary education" (*Communio et Progressio*, No. 111).

## Recommendations

1. There is a need for a comprehensive and ongoing program in social communication for formation of priests and seminarians to become effective pastors and evangelizers.

2. Special issues, like pornography, violence and the need for ecumenical and interreligious communication, should be given due importance (cf. documents of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, May 7 and October 4, 1989).

3. Faculties should prepare the curriculum with an integral approach, which makes communication a part of philosophical and theological subjects.

4. Seminary professors need to adapt their methods of teaching to the new communication environment.

5. FABC-OSC should put up a website on resources and syllabi for formation in communication, media culture and theology.

6. Talents in this field are to be identified; and seminarians and priests are to be encouraged to develop them for effective priestly ministry and mission.

7. Pastors should be trained to "accept and recognize professionals in communication and develop and promote dialogue and collaboration with them" (Bishops' Meet '98, no. 6).

8. Following the demand of the Second Vatican Council, bishops and bishops' conferences are urged to implement these recommendations on the diocesan and national levels (cf. *Inter Mirifica*, No. 20-21).

9. FABC offices should collaborate in joint programs and activities to implement these recommendations.

## VI. "MEGATRENDS ASIA: COMMUNICATION TRENDS FOR THE CHURCH?" BANGKOK, THAILAND, 22-27 NOVEMBER, 1999

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

#### Preamble

As Asia enters the third millennium, ethnic, linguistic, economic and cultural diversities seem to emerge sharper, and affect the life and mentality of a growing and teeming population. The Asian continent benefits from the advancements in science and technology, and becomes a major player in the world of trade and commerce. Media are a chief element in this development.

There are emerging trends which cannot be ignored.\* They are, to different degrees, influencing the actual situation and future of the Asian continent. These "megatrends" challenge Church leaders and Christian communicators in a special way.

## 1. From Nations to Networks

Today, there are no longer individual countries battling with each other for political or economic supremacy. Many have aligned with each other for reasons often more economic than political. Networks are emerging based more on ethnic affiliations and/or common economic interests.

### *Challenges*

1. Because of the importance of the public image of the Church in a mainly non-Christian environment, it is necessary to develop Communication/Public Relations offices at national and diocesan levels with information systems, like faxes, e-mail, Internet, intranet, websites, etc., so that information can be easily accessed, and networking be done. (Cf. BISCOP I (1997); BISCOP I.1 (1999); Bishops' Meet '98, 4). \*\*

2. Collaborative efforts should be made at parish, diocesan, regional and national levels for periodicals and other Church productions for Christians from different cultures and nations, to get to know each other better and join forces.

3. Beyond our own chapels and churches, we can provide in our Catholic institutions prayer rooms where people of all religious denominations can "feel at home."

4. Christian communication must help to make people aware of various trade agreements (like NAFTA, APEC, etc.) to help them safeguard their rights and prevent exploitation.

## 2. From Export to Consumer "Cultures"

There was a time when Asia produced mainly low-cost consumer products for export. Now Japan and the other Asian economic "tigers" have ventured into telecommunications, computers and other

---

\* cf. John Naisbitt: *Megatrends Asia*. New York (Simon & Schuster), 1997; Asiaweek, Special Edition: "Asian in the New Millennium," (volume 25, number 23), August 20-27, 1999.

\*\* For FABC-OSC documents quoted, refer to "FABC Paper No. 85", August, 1999; Revised and Enlarged Edition, October, 1999.

modern industries. This leads to greater economic prosperity, but also to emerging strong consumer "cultures" (cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 77, 39).

### **Challenges**

1. Consumerist and Western influences tend to develop cultures without God and deeper values. Christian communication must help to keep God and bring him back into the center of human life, which corresponds very much with Asian values (cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 29).

2. Christian media education should help people to identify their real needs and not be carried away by manipulations. These programs must be integrated into every Church ministry (cf. Bishops' Meet '96; Bishops' Meet '97, 5d).

3. Against the dominance of a "consumer culture," Christian communicators should help to build alternative cultures based on a deep and communicating spirituality.

4. Issues of justice, peace and social equality are essential contents of any Christian communication.

5. Consumers should be made aware of real facts behind advertisements and marketing strategies. Good advertising, on the other hand, can help promote Asian and Christian values (cf. Pontifical Council for Social Communications, "Ethics in Advertising," Rome 1997).

### **3. From the Western to the Asian Way**

In Asia, we become more and more conscious of traditions and values in our own cultures, as well of our political, economic and socio-cultural identities. The "Asian Way" grows more and more popular also in other continents and countries of the world.

### **Challenges**

1. The FABC triple dialogue, with the poor, religions and various Asian cultures, needs to be further developed and supported through corresponding communication programs (cf. Bishops' Meet '97, 3).

2. We are still seen as very Western in our religious practices. Christian communication should help towards a more inculturated Church in the using of more Asian symbols and communicative expressions. Within the Church, liturgical celebrations, especially homilies, should be communicative, and respond to the real needs and feelings of people (cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 22).

3. Christianity very often is seen as a religion of social action, education and governance. The effect of prayer and spirituality, however, should be reflected in our communications, because a Christian communicator is a "contemplative in action" (cf. Bishops' Meet '98, 1). Our prayer and spirituality are finally people-centered, because we communicate the full truth about the human person, whose dignity is based on "being an image and likeness of God," empowered by the Spirit of Jesus in the fullness of the Father's love (FABC Consultation on Evangelization and Communication, 1999, Orientations and Recommendation, I.2).

4. The growing gap between different ages and cultural groups needs to be bridged through proper dialogue and communication.

5. Not everything traditional is automatically good. Cultures influence each other. Christian communication must help to discern the real values, priorities and needs of communities and individuals, leading to a responsible approach.

#### **4. From Government-Controlled to Market-Driven**

While the role of governments is being limited to upholding laws and auditing, the management of enterprises and public utilities is handed over to the private sector. The growing privatization also of media enterprises creates additional communication possibilities, as well as responsibilities.

#### ***Challenges***

1. In an environment more and more market-oriented, Christian communication should continue to highlight the plight of the poor, the marginalized, minorities, indigenous cultures, migrant workers, etc. They should treasure the values of dying cultures, and help them survive.

2. Christian media need to be the "voice of the voiceless." Since privatized communication enterprises very often ignore the marginalized, we should have the courage to highlight their situations and needs. (cf. Bishops' Meet '97, 1)

3. Education for environment and issues of ecology needs to be addressed by Christian communication.

4. Christian communicators should contribute to the protection of cultural and religious sites, and keep them from exaggerated commercialized tourism.

#### **5. From Villages to Supercities**

Cities are becoming bigger, due to migration from the country-

side. A majority of the "supercities" of the world in the 21st century will be in Asia.

### **Challenges**

1. Urban ministries need a special communication approach. Christian communication should help people to grow from anonymity to community.

2. Village people should be made aware that they are not powerless. Grass-root communication projects help to develop such an awareness, and should contribute to a positive acceptance of rural values.

3. "Media cells" in every parish can help develop an approach which serves in a special way local needs.

## **6. From Labor-Intensive to High-Technology**

Advancements in science and technology have also pushed Asia to pioneer a revolution in high technology. A "reverse brain-drain" is starting to take place.

### **Challenges**

1. Christian communication should help to promote high-tech education to contribute to the development of our countries.

2. Young people, especially in cities, grow up with the latest communication equipment. Church leaders should be aware of the importance and possibilities of modern communication technologies for their communities, especially for their young members, and take up these challenges (cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 37c).

## **7. From Rich to Poor**

In spite of seeming prosperity and development, a growing economic imbalance in several Asian countries, and the distance between the rich and the poor, cannot be denied.

### **Challenges**

1. Church communicators should help to make the poor aware of their situation, and promote programs designed for their development (cf. Paulo Freire: "*conscientization*").

2. They should challenge the rich, and make multinationals aware of their responsibility to the human family, so that the world's resources are shared among all.



3. Church communicators should help see the effects of globalization, both positive and negative. Globalization should not damage people and nations in their dignity, but contribute to their development.

## **8. From Traditions to Options**

In the past, young people grew up in societies based on stable, cultural, moral and spiritual traditions. Now, these traditions are very often substituted for through different options available to the individual and community (cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 7, 39).

### ***Challenges***

1. Christian communication should show the value of traditions, and at the same time also help to discern new developments.

2. Young people especially need guidance in a more and more diversified society. Christian communicators should be their companions and guides, and not be interested only in material or financial gain from their operations (cf. Bishops' Meet '97, 4).

3. In the modern communication situation, where the news is available to everybody at an instance, journalists and Church leaders are not anymore just "gatekeepers" who determine what reaches the audience. They must be "guides" through the jungle of options, inspired by the principles and visions of Christian faith.

## **9. Emergence of Women**

More and more women are holding positions of importance which were traditionally held by men. Education of women at various levels helped towards such a development.

### ***Challenges***

1. The situation of women, especially where they are degraded, e.g., through infanticide, dowry deaths, sex-trade, etc., should be addressed in an efficient way by Christian communicators.

2. In Church media centers women should be promoted to be directors, teachers, and not merely to work as secretaries and helpers.

3. Christian communicators should create programs, where dialogue between traditional and newly-emerging groups of women can be facilitated.

## 10. From Belief to Fundamentalism

The emergence of fundamentalism and secularism has given rise to insecurity and confrontational situations among various groups of nations and communities.

### *Challenges*

1. The Church and our leaders should avoid everything which leads people to being fanatical. Christian communication must foster co-operation, as well as unity; and balance the extremes emerging in communities and societies (cf. Bishops' Meet '97).

2. Christian communication should highlight similarities and values common to all Asian religions, and help people to respect each other, especially in their religious convictions (cf. Bishops' Meet '97; '98).

## VII. "A RENEWED CHURCH IN ASIA: COMMUNICATING LOVE AND SERVICE" JOHOR BAHRU, MALAYSIA NOVEMBER 27 – DECEMBER 2, 2000

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The 7th plenary assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, from January 3-12, 2000, in Thailand on the theme, "A Renewed Church in Asia: Mission of Love and Service," made us aware of the consequences of our work in the communications apostolate.

The bishops, their secretaries in charge of communication in bishops' conferences in thirteen (13) Asian countries, and experts coming together at Johor Bahru, Malaysia to study the theme "A Renewed Church in Asia: *Communicating* Love and Service," offer these considerations.

### 1. Communicating Love and Service

It is our understanding that there can be no service without love; and hence, the service rendered by the Church in its various spheres of activities need to be charged by Divine Love, of which Jesus Christ is the supreme example.

To communicate love and service to the peoples in Asia, we, as communicators, need first to develop a personal relationship with

God, and then with our audience. We must touch peoples' lives, as spiritual persons who provide services to them (cf. BM '98, 1f).\* To awaken peoples' conscience and to struggle for justice often means building bridges with people from different walks of life.

More specifically, today in Asia, we shall communicate love and service by:

- Identifying ourselves with the peoples of Asia through a deeper listening and availability. In this process of communicating, we are called to be and to journey with the people. This listening implies being enriched by faith-experience, cultural diversity, literary traditions and the wisdom of the past.

- A healing ministry enlightened by truth and justice, like that of the Good Samaritan, to the people wounded by ethnic, interreligious and linguistic conflicts, as well as political, economic and cultural exploitation.

- Enduring patiently the present-day sufferings and tortures, like the suffering servant through forgiveness and compassion, and being able to change the situation by working relentlessly with fortitude.

- Promoting fraternity, liberty and human dignity, and refusing religious fanaticism, "ghettoism" and exclusivity.

- Fostering greater ecumenism among all Christians, and openness to interfaith dialogue (cf. BM '97, 3).

- Befriending and empowering our brothers and sisters experiencing the negative effects of globalization and a market economy in the Spirit of Kingdom values.

- Promoting the activities of Basic Christian Communities (BCCs) and traditional groupings, with emphasis on the young and the family.

## **2. A Renewing Church Communicating Love and Service**

To witness the life of a renewed, and always renewing, Church with the people in Asia, communicators should focus on facts based on the communion of communities (cf. A New Way of Being Church in Asia, BM '97,1), which comes from the word of God. By promoting the value of this communion, communicators can help improve the quality of peoples.

---

\* BM = "FABC-OSC Bishops' Meet"

A renewing Church expects to:

- Continue social and humanitarian services to enrich and empower people, helping them stand on their own feet, and retain human dignity. The help offered needs to come not only from abundance or from foreign support, but from what we have.
- Be a community sharing and reflecting charity, including talents and resources: "Look how they love each other ..." (Acts 2:43ff, 4:32ff)
- Respect and dialogue with other religions through service and charity (cf. BM '97,3).
- Be a Church of the poor ("*anawim*"), open to the spiritual and material needs of the people.
- Be a participatory Church, wherein especially the role of laity is duly recognized (cf. BM '97,2).
- Be aware of the gifts and charisms of its members, and use them for the growth of the Church.
- Be a Church generating and serving life.
- Welcome new ways of communication in witnessing, catechesis, worship, and proclamation (cf. BISCOP II, 1999).

### 3. Ways and Means of Communicating Love and Service

Every Christian, by his/her way of life, must communicate love and service. His/her words and deeds should radiate Christ.

All means of communication are at our disposal. We need to stress, however, that *traditional means*, which have grown over centuries in culture, are the very root of communications. Only through a clear understanding of the traditional means can we really discover the Asian way of communicating, and, thus, the Asian face of Jesus.

The *mass media* available to the Church today should be seen not only under commercial and consumerist possibilities, but rather should be used by the Church as an alternative voice, disregarding commercial gains.

*Modern communication technologies* (cf. BISCOP II, 1999) are offering the Church new ways of communicating the Good News, as well as increasing pastoral possibilities.

---

\*\* BISCOP = "Bishops' Institute for Social Communication"

A renewing Church must use all forms of communication available, especially newly emerging technologies. However, all these new developments cannot substitute for a living, face-to-face, dialogue.

The Christian communicator should move freely in different ways of communicating, and be able to balance the use of the media of communications according to the call of the Gospel.

Special communication concerns in a renewing Church are:

- A spirituality, which "flows out of the communication of the Holy Trinity" (Bishops' Meet '98), reflected in and matched with deep daily life experiences is a must. Such a spirituality is horizontal and vertical, personal and communitarian at the same time.

- A communicator needs to develop a spirituality emerging from his / her own deep experience of God's love. A deep commitment to experience the message giver (Triune God), the message (God's love), and ways of "witnessing" and sharing this message (self-communication as well as communication skills) are basic elements of this spirituality (cf. BM '98).

Of special concern in our communication are:

- Basic Christian Communities, Small Christian Communities, catechesis, biblical apostolate, family, women, migrant workers, youth, formation of priests and religious, and inter-religious initiatives;

- Social action and development of people;
- Formation and training of communicators.

An effective communicator must be familiar with all of these ministries. He/she should live a deep spirituality of communication, strongly identifying himself/herself with Jesus, "the perfect communicator" (Communio et Progressio, 11).

**VIII. RADIO VERITAS ASIA:  
"MISSIONARY OF ASIA" \*  
by FRANZ-JOSEF EILERS, SVD**

It was at a meeting of South East Asian bishops in Manila, 1958, where the first idea for a continental radio station for the Asian con-

---

\* Reported at the annual meeting of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Vatican City, March, 2001.

tinant was born. Cardinal Santos from Manila took up the proposal, and presented it in the following years to the German government for financial and personnel support. The German Bishops' Conference backed the plan, and thus the first steps for a "Radio Veritas" were taken. The station was finally inaugurated in Quezon City (Manila) on April 11, 1969.

In the beginning Radio Veritas had an overseas service for Asian countries and a home service for the Philippines under the responsibility of the archdiocese of Manila. This home section, however, separated into an independent commercial station in 1990. Thus, the overseas service became independent, under the name of "Radio Veritas Asia" (RVA), and stayed non-commercial, totally committed to evangelization and development in Asia. Besides, *Radio Vaticana*, it is the only continent-wide short wave radio station of the Church, broadcasting in 17 languages spoken in 21 Asian countries. The legal owner is the "Philippine Radio Educational and Information Center" (PREIC), composed of Filipino bishops and professionals. The administration, operation and financing of "Radio Veritas Asia" is the responsibility of the "Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences" (FABC), represented through their "Office of Social Communication" (OSC), based in Manila. The board of five bishops of this office is at the same time on the board for RVA.

Programs are, as much as possible, produced in production centers of the target areas under the responsibility of the national or regional bishops' conferences, and complemented by the different language sections in the RVA studios in Quezon City (Manila) in the Philippines. The programs are aired through three 250 kW transmitters, with 16 directional antennas from Palauig, Zambales, some 220 km. northwest of Manila.

Of the different languages the biggest portion is devoted to the Mandarin program, with broadcasts every day for four hours into mainland China. To this are added another 50 minutes in Mandarin as a relay from Vatican Radio. Further for China, other 30-minute programs in Cantonese are added. The Vietnamese program follows with another 2 1/2 hours every day; whereas other language broadcasts, between 30 minutes and one hour each, are in four Burmese languages (Burmese, Karen, Kachin and Zomi-Chin), Indonesian, Sinhala, Urdu, Tamil, Telugu and Hindi. A daily program in Filipino aims at the many Filipino Overseas Contract workers, all over Asia and beyond. Besides a beam to East Asia (Hong Kong), there is a special transmission to Russia, and those Arab countries where Christians are not allowed to have their own religious services.

The financing of Radio Veritas Asia is undertaken by different European funding agencies and Propaganda Fide in Rome. Many Asian bishops give every year US\$1000 from their annual diocesan subsidy for the station. The bishops' conferences of Japan, Korea and Thailand contribute as well. Despite several attempts, it has been till now not possible to secure additional financial support from other countries and continents, like the United States, Canada and Australia. Within the Philippines a newly created "Radio Veritas Asia Foundation" tries to find local benefactors, and involves itself also in public relation activities to make the station more known within the country and beyond.

New technical advances challenge our future development of the Asian broadcasting ministry, along with the additional possibilities of Internet broadcasting. A recent conference in Germany (February 14-15) of funding agencies and experts, etc., and of experts, on the future of RVA showed that short-wave broadcasts still will be important in the future, but should be complemented by the new Internet possibilities where programs can be made available to suit individual needs and demands. The new technologies also widen the possibilities for editing, programming and co-operation between the station and production centers in the target areas. With the help of "cbcpNet," the new Internet provider of the Philippine Bishops' Conference (CBCP), producers and editors in the studios in Quezon City are now fully connected with the Net. On the way they have, besides others, broader access to local news and information from their target areas.

The continent of Asia, where Catholics are only some 3% of the total population of 3.5 billion, poses a tremendous challenge for evangelization via radio and Internet. In "Radio Veritas Asia" we have a unique possibility which no other continent of the world has. Pope John Paul II is aware of this. He writes in his Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* : "I echo the Synod Fathers' commendation of Radio Veritas Asia, the only continent-wide radio station for the Church in Asia, for its almost thirty years of evangelization through broadcasting. Efforts must be made to strengthen this excellent instrument of mission, through appropriate language programming, personnel and financial help from episcopal conferences and dioceses in Asia." At the 25th anniversary celebration of the station during the Pope's visit in Manila, he felt that "RVA continues to be a powerful expression of the co-responsibility of the bishops of Asia pursuing with vision and enthusiasm the Church's missionary mandate." For him, "Radio Veritas faces the urgent task of finding ever more effective ways of sustaining and informing the faith of those who

already believe in Christ, and of proclaiming him and his kingdom to those who do not yet know him ... Radio Veritas can be proud of the respectful dialogue which it fosters with the followers of other religions, who make such a large part of its listeners. Today more than ever, the followers of various religious traditions need to know each other better, in order to work together in defending those common human and spiritual values, without which a society worthy of man cannot be build. Through its educational, news and entertainment programs, Radio Veritas Asia, contributes to the human development of countless individuals and families."

In the last ten years the station received about 950,000 letters from listeners. Only 35 % of them are from Catholics. The remaining 65 % are from members of other religions, like Muslims, Buddhists, Hindu, and even non-believers. Here are just three examples:

A listener from Beijing writes: " I am really grateful to Radio Veritas providing us with such high quality rich and precious programs, and for friends overseas...enabling me to understand adequately the beginning developments, growth changes, and the essence of traditional Chinese philosophical thinking. ...Since the mainland China uses Marx philosophy... many ideas are quite extreme and restricted, lacking objective views....

Another one from a Chinese province writes: "The Catholic radio broadcast has entered my life. It is like a theologate on the air providing formation for me. It is my spiritual director, a friend with wisdom, and is the vessel of my living water. I listen to it every day. It has very good programs, pluralistic forms, with different shades and colors, but mainly focussing on Christ's gospel, tainted with life dynamics, and are soul nourishing..."

A young man of another part of Asia: " I am a refugee in Thailand. I am a Buddhist. I am a regular listener of RVA. Although I am in difficulties, I never get discouraged because RVA is strengthening, encouraging and consoling me. I wish to be a Catholic. I hope I will be baptized in the month of December."

#### **IX. "RADIO VERITAS ASIA: PROGRAMMING FOR THE FUTURE" \***

*The following is a keynote address given at the opening of an international program planning seminar (August 7-12, 2000) for*

---

\* Printed in *DIWA: Studies in Philosophy and Theology*, vol. 25, no. 2 (November 2000), Quezon City, Philippines, pp. 124-132.



*Radio Veritas Asia (RVA)'s coordinators, producers and target area representatives from 17 different languages the RVA is broadcasting in daily. This only continental Catholic short-wave radio station is legally established in the Philippines, but is operated and financed through the "Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences" (FABC).*

*The keynote speaker, Franz-Josef Eilers, svd, is the executive secretary of the FABC "Office of Social Communication" (OSC) based in Manila. Here follows the text of the address with footnotes:*

A radio station exists for its programing, and the programing for the people to be reached. If the programing meets the needs and expectations of the listeners, they will tune in, and let themselves be affected.

In more than 30 years of its existence Radio Veritas Asia has struggled in many ways to fulfill her mission. Often financial and technical concerns were in the forefront; and sometimes the programing might have been neglected. With programs in 17 different languages the needs of the audience are very different, and the experience of the producers and production centers are also not always on the same level. Because of all this, there seems to be a special need to reflect, reorient and animate for the "mission of love and service" to the people in Asia, as the recent 7th FABC General Assembly (January 3 to 13, 2000) indicated in their overall theme: *A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service.*

How can we as RVA communicate "love and service" to Asia?

### ***I. Mission***

Let me first review what the leaders of the Church said and expect from our work:

1. At the inauguration of the station on April 11, 1969, Pope Paul VI, in a message broadcast via Vatican Radio, expressed his expectation that "with God's help the bishops of South East Asia will bring this immensely significant enterprise to full achievement, aided by the unselfish contribution of clergy and people, which we earnestly solicit."

2. Almost 10 years later, on September 28, 1978, Pope John Paul I, on the day before his sudden death, challenged some bishops from the Philippines: "We are aware that the Philippines has a great vocation in being the light of Christ in the Far East to proclaim his

death, his love, his justice and salvation by word and example before its neighbors, the people of Asia. We know that you have a privileged instrument in this regard: Radio Veritas..."

3. Pope John Paul II recalled the history and mission of RVA in a special way at the silver jubilee celebration, during his visit to Manila, January 1995: "Radio Veritas Asia began as the fruit of a strong missionary commitment on the part of South East Asian bishops gathered for a general meeting in 1958. Their idea was to enable Asians to hear the good news of Jesus Christ from other Asians..."

Today, RVA continues to be a powerful expression of the co-responsibility of the bishops of Asia in pursuing with vision and enthusiasm the Church's missionary mandate." Pope John Paul II then calls RVA "the voice of Asian Christianity," and refers to the special commitment for "the Church of silence" and suffering Christians. He expects "an ever greater commitment to evangelization.. to proclaim Christ to all peoples." For him "Radio Veritas faces the urgent task of finding ever more effective ways of sustaining and informing the faith of those who already believe in Christ, and of proclaiming him and his kingdom to those who do not yet know him.

Through its religious program Radio Veritas Asia spreads knowledge of Gospel truths and values, and makes possible a far-reaching, often barely conscious, dialogue of the mind between the message of salvation in Jesus Christ and the "seeds of the word," present in the ancient traditions of Asia, both cultural and religious. The proclamation of the Gospel, when carried out with respect and with the attitude of sharing a precious gift with those who have not yet received it, is an invaluable service to the human family, shaping people's hearts in accordance with truth and love....

Radio Veritas Asia can be proud of the respectful dialogue which it fosters with the followers of other religions, who make such a large part of its listeners. Today more than ever, the followers of the various religious traditions need to know each other better, in order to work together in defending those common human and spiritual values without which a society worthy of man cannot be built. Through its educational, news and entertainment programs, Radio Veritas Asia contributes to the human development of countless individuals and families.

The same Pope gives his support to RVA once again in the final document of the Roman Synod for Asia, his Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, where he echoes "the Synod Fathers' commendation of Radio Veritas Asia, the only continent-wide radio station for the Church in Asia, for its almost 30 years of evangelization through broadcasting..."(No.48).

## II. Approaches

1. From this documentation the role of RVA programming is very clear: the station is like the voice of Christ himself speaking into the here-and-now of our Asian reality. RVA is in my understanding, beyond being the "voice of Christianity in Asia" the voice of Christ himself.

- How did Christ communicate to his people? He understood their situations, and is compassionate with the sick and dying, the poor and downtrodden. His healing and other miracles re-established the communication line for the blind and deaf, the mute and fearful. Does our broadcast do the same?

- He proclaims the message of the Father, and promises the coming of God's Holy Spirit. Do we do the same?

- He announces peace and understanding, and longs for all to become one. Do we do the same or do we divide, e.g., according to cultural and political affiliations?

- He spends himself totally up to his death on the cross...Do we do the same?

Our mission in the service of evangelization calls first and foremost for a deep spirituality from where our programming must flow. The work at RVA is more than just a job, a profession or function without any commitment. We must be committed people, driven from an inner fire originating from the Lord in his Spirit. Only this way are we really able to live, develop and share the Spirit of Christ... (1)

2. On this grounding we can further detect from the above statements three main areas of concern and content for our programming:

- Very clear is the commitment to *evangelization*, to proclaim.

- A "respectful *dialogue*" with other religions, and between the salvation of Christ and the "seeds of the Word" present in the an-

cient traditions of Asia," is another issue.

- Mutual concerns about common human and spiritual values through educational programs, news, and even entertainment, should be special contributions of RVA to human development, justice and peace.

The "mix" of these elements in the individual programming will depend on the special needs and situations of the people in the different target areas.

2.1 For *evangelization* we might first remind ourselves of what Pope Paul VI summarized as the consideration of the Synod on Evangelization (1974) in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975). He reminds us that we have to follow Christ as the "first and principal herald of the Gospel" (No.7), who proclaimed the "kingdom of God." He described "in many ways the joy of belonging to this kingdom, and this happiness comprises many things which the world rejects"(No.8)." As the kernel and center of his Good News Christ proclaims salvation, this great gift of God which is liberation from everything that oppresses people, but which is above all liberation from sin and the Evil One" (No.9).

Some "Orientations" of the FABC Consultation on Evangelization, from July 4 to 8 1999, may give us further directions for our programming: (2)

- "In proclaiming Jesus to the peoples of Asia, we communicate 'the full truth about the human person' whose dignity is based on 'being an image and likeness of God, empowered by the Spirit of Jesus for the fullness of the Father's love" (cf. EN, No. 15).

- "The human person is the basis of our dialogue with all people of good will, all religions and cultures, and especially with the poor and young people of Asia. We are committed to bring Jesus' message to all nations of Asia. Our contribution lies in the witnessing and dialogue of faith and life, Gospel and culture, Church and society."

- "The Church as a communion-in-mission has to begin by evangelizing herself, by the life and ministry of Jesus. She has to be transformed by 'the full truth of the human person'( cf. EN, No. 15). Evangelization calls for such a renewal (mission *ad intra*), since the Church is a pilgrim among the Asian peoples."

- "Social communication is intimately linked with the mission of the Church within herself (*ad intra*) and to the outside world (*ad extra*)."

- "The proclamation of the Good News in Asia is based on the 'triple dialogue' (FABC) with the poor, cultures and religions. This

involves also all areas of human behavior, thought patterns, social and cultural dynamics, environment and modern technology."

2.2 The FABC's "New Way of being Church in Asia" demands in a special way *witnessing and dialogue*, together with the prophetic mission of the Church. Here, some considerations of the Social Communication bishops in their "FABC-OSC Meet" 1997 (3) may be of help, like, e.g., their word on the witnessing and dialoguing Church: "our communication must be concerned with the world, where people live in their joys and hopes, their fears and anxieties, reaching 'out to people of other faiths and persuasions in a dialogue of life towards the integral liberation of all' (FABC Bandung)." In concrete terms the meeting beside others states:

- "Communicating with other religions and peoples of good will in mutual trust, openness and transparency the Church needs to look beyond institutional boundaries moving into the unknown led by the Spirit within."

- "Networking and co-operation with other religions should be promoted. Concrete plans should be worked out in the context of common issues which affect all. This 'requires reciprocal trust and understanding among Catholics, other Christians, and members of other religions, based on mutual respect, and with a view of doing things together in communication' (Pontifical Council for Social Communication, "Criteria for Ecumenical and Inter-religious Co-operation," 1989, No.19)."

- "Interfaith dialogue leading to understanding and co-operation should be an aspect of *all* our communication programs and activities. It is imperative to make it clear to our brothers and sisters of other faiths that we are not in any way aligned with destructive forces in the 'new media culture.' Failure to do so will alienate them further from us." (FABC-OSC Bishops' Meet '96). In most countries of Asia, Christianity is a minority, where we need to let other religions feel that we respect them, and they can trust in us. We celebrate, e.g., national and religious festivals, with all. God loves everybody."

- "If we are a *prophetic Church*, we should be a 'leaven of transformation in this world and serve as a prophetic sign to point beyond this world' (FABC, Bandung). Therefore, our Church communication must challenge, announce and denounce...In what way are we crying out like the prophets with conviction and in a convincing manner? ...Are we seen as standing with people crying out for jus-

tice, harmony, equality, and ecology?"

- "We should not only cry over unsolvable problems of our countries but also highlight the fact that our continent is rich in cultures, traditions, values and religions. Filled with such riches, the Church should think of herself as a giving and not only receiving community. She should perceive this as a new call to integrate the Gospel values into the 'new culture created by media' (*Redemptoris Missio*, No. 37c)..."

- "The fact that many *young people* are seeking peace and are looking for the beyond in other religions should challenge us to see more the signs of the times and to try to fill the void in their hearts in collaboration with all people of good will."

2.3 In our programming we cannot overlook the *realities of our Asian continent* in the Third Millennium. John Naisbitt has described eight megatrends in Asia which the Asian Communication bishops complemented last year (1999) in Thailand with two more. Their considerations and reflections will definitely be helpful positioning ourselves in our programming. (4)

The bishops call, beside others, for a better networking; for better information on political and economic realities to make consumers aware of the real facts and their consequences; to become more aware of our Asian against Western values, and to defend the poor against a mere market-driven and market-oriented environment. The growth from village to super-cities must be of special concern, as well as the developments in high technology and their consequences, especially for young people in education and personal development. The poor have to be supported in their rights and possibilities. A special concern should be given to young people, who today very often do not grow up any more in their traditions, but are confronted with many options. They find it difficult to weigh them and match them with traditional and Christian values.

### *III. Some Challenges*

1. At the end of last year Jolyon P. Mitchell, an Anglican minister and communications professor at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, published a book on "Radio and the Renaissance of Preaching," edited "*Visually Speaking*" (5). He points to the fact that we need a renewed, *re-formed language*, which builds less on abstract theological concepts but rather "upon the art of making pictures with words" (p.6). He sees a shift towards a more conversational form of

preaching, moving from proclamation to conversation (pp.21f, 32, 64), which observations he also makes along with some well-known religious broadcasters. Summarizing their principles he puts them into three simple words which could also inspire our programming: knowledge, conversation, and engagement.

- *Knowledge*: know your audience and react accordingly: "preachers need to engage critically with their communicative environment" (p.98)

- *Conversation*: use a conversational style, create "real talk"!

- *Engagement*: involve listeners more actively in the communication process; use images, pictures, stories and "paint pictures with words"!

For such a kind of programming a special responsibility lies also upon the RVA production centers in the target areas. The more we listen to the local people and their needs, the more we can help them to build up and sustain their lives.

2. Besides: As Radio Veritas Asia, we have indeed a special obligation to our fellow *Churches in countries where they cannot freely communicate* and share their religion. For their religious instruction, but also for spiritual enrichment, our broadcasts are very often the only source available. The main reason for the foundation of RVA more than 30 years ago was exactly this service to what was called at that time the *Silent Church*.

3. The many *young people* of Asia should be a growing challenge for us. More than 50% of the Asian population is below 35 years of age. Is this reflected in our programming? And many of these young people are confronted and enveloped in new technical developments. A recent survey of "cyber universities" in Korea (6) lists some characteristics of "Webbies" within the 20 to 29-year range. They:

- Are a "I consume, therefore I exist" generation
- Have no gender limitations
- Can't go anywhere without "hp" (hand phone)
- "Politics?" Not my agenda"
- "I am me – nobody rules me"
- With Internet the world is my stage
- Face-lift? Why not!
- Night time is better
- Computer games are our toys
- Plastic card goes
- E-learning (learning by e-mail/Internet)

This Korean situation might not yet be the same in other parts of Asia, but things can rapidly develop that way. Are we ready to answer to such a challenge?

4. There are additional *technical challenges* coming up for the way we do our "broadcasting," which have also consequences for programming. At a recent international conference in Singapore on communication research a board member of a European short-wave radio station recalled the history of short-wave broadcasting as originally being the concern to transmit messages and programs through the antennas. This "Antenna-Transmission-Model," as he called it, is today substituted by an "Interactive-Network-Model," which refers to the new openings of Internet broadcasting. "Organizations for foreign broadcasting can only survive, if they radically alter their concept, leave the one-way logic of antenna broadcasting, and follow the interactive concept of the net..." The Internet with its two opposite communication streams is the ideal technology to realize the new concept that would be one of a dialogue of cultures." (7).

This is not only a technical challenge, but also a program opportunity, with vital consequences on content and presentation. Here it interesting to note that, according to a recent report in the *International Herald Tribune* (July 28, 2000), the number of Internet users in China almost doubled since the beginning of this year, from 8.9 million users to 16.9 million now. According to the same report the average Chinese Internet user is 30 years old, university-educated and earns \$221.42 a month, with the tendency towards lower age and income groups as Internet users.

5. For all of this we need a *team spirit* not only in the studios and station itself, but also between Manila and the production centers in the target areas. Such a *team spirit* should be also fostered through the program advisory boards which we are trying to create in the target areas. Only as a team and in mutual support and trust can we give a real testimony of our faith, and contribute to the building of the Kingdom. "Look how they love each other" was the trademark of the first Christians, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. This should be also ours!

#### ***IV. Conclusion***

A radio station exists for its programming; but behind this result are those who produce the program. The more they are one with the mission of the Lord and the needs of the people, the more they serve and fulfill their own mission! Let's take up this challenge!



## NOTES

1. Cf. Carlo Martini, *Communicating Christ to the World*, Manila (Claretians), 1996.
2. "Church and Social Communication in Asia," *FABC Papers No. 85*, Hong Kong, 1996. Third (enlarged) edition, Manila 2000, p. 62 ff.
3. *Op. cit.*, p.9 ff.
4. *Op. cit.*, p.70 ff.
5. Jolyon P. Mitchell, *Visually Speaking: Radio and the Renaissance of Preaching*, Edinburgh (T&T Clark), 1999, (pp. 21f., 32, 64,98).
6. Dr. Yoo Jae Song, "Cyber Universities in Korea: Problems and Prospects." paper presented at the IAMCR Conference, Singapore, July 17-20, 2000.
7. Hans J. Kleinsteuber, "Antennas or Nets? From foreign broadcasting to a dialogue of cultures," IAMCR (International Association for Media and Communication Research) Programme and Abstracts, Singapore, 2000 p. 21. Workshop Communication Technology, session 3.

## Published November 2001

### FABC Papers:

- No. 90. Emerging Demands of Mission of the Church at the Turn of the Century; the Church as a Servant of Hope for the Peoples of Asia, by Soosai Arokiasamy. A Position Paper for the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 2000.
91. The Renewal That Awaits the Church in Asia, by Luis Antonio G. Tagle. A Position Paper for the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 2000.
92. Seventh Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guides
  - a. Church and Social Communication in Asia, by the FABC Office of Social Communication.
  - b. The Witness of Consecrated Life in Asia Today, by Sr. Julma C. Neo.
  - c. A Renewed Church in Asia: In Solidarity with Women, by Virginia Saldanha.
  - d. Formation for Priesthood in Asia, by Vicente Cajilig.
  - e. Continuing Formation for Priesthood in Asia, by Vicente Cajilig.
  - f. A Renewed Church in Asia. A Mission of Love and Service to Migrant Workers and Refugees in the Third Millennium, by Jigger S. Latoza.
  - g. A Renewd Mission of Love and Service to the Indigenous/Tribal Peoples of Asia, by Sebastian Karotempel.

- h. The Charismatic Movements and Small Church Communities, by Antonio B. de los Reyes.
- i. Gospel-Based Communities Becoming Agents of Change, by Cora Mateo.
- j. Lay Ministries in the Renewed Church of Asia, by Thomas Vijay.
- k. Interreligious Dialogue in Pursuit of Fullness of Life in Asia, by Edmund Chia.
- l. A Church in Universal Harmony and Solidarity through Justice and Peace, by Anthony Rogers.
- m. The Call to a Renewed Church in Asia and the Challenges of Religious Fundamentalism, by John Locke.
- n. Opening Paths to Life through Education, by Lourdes J. Custodio.
- o. The Church in Mission *ad Gentes*, by Saturnino Dias.
- p. Human Values and the Pursuit of a Full Humanity in Asia, by John Mansford Prior.
- q. The Asian Image of Jesus: Theological, Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Renewal, by Jacob Theckanath.
- r. Christian Duty of Advocacy for Transformation of Society, by R. J. Rajkumar.
- s. A New Ecumenical Vision for the New Millennium, by Thomas Michel.
- t. The Role of Working Professionals in Building a Just World, by Anselmo Lee.
- u. Springtime of Holiness: A Continuing Call to Spirituality in Asia, by Arturo M. Bastes.

\* \* \*

Additional Workshops:

- 72 f. Young Adults in a Renewed Church, with Jun Hashimoto and Aloysius Tan.
- g. A Mission of Love to the Family, with Sister Catherine Bernard Haliburn.

\* \* \*

- 93. A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service. The Final Statement of the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops, 2000.
- 94. Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*. The Church in Asia. The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, 1999.
- 95. A Renewed Church in Asia: Pastoral Directions for a New Decade, a Pastoral Report of the FABC Seventh Plenary Assembly, 2000.

96. Methodology: Asian Christian Theology. Doing Theology in Asia Today. A Document of the Office of Theological Concerns of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 2000.
97. Participation of the Roman Catholic Church in National Councils of Churches, by Thomas Michel, S.J., and by J.M.R. Tillard, O.P., 2001.
98. The Church in Asia in the 3rd Millennium, a Guidebook to the Apostolic Exhortation – The Church in Asia, Ecclesia in Asia. A Pastoral Study Prepared by the FABC Office of Human Development, 2001.
99. Asian Movement for Christian Unity III (AMCU), Giving Shape to a New Ecumenical Vision, A Joint CCA-FABC Project, 2001.
100. An Index of FABC Papers, 1976-2001, edited by James Kroeger, 2001.

\*\*\*\*\*  
 \* FABC PAPERS is a project of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), designed to bring the thinking of Asian experts to a wider audience, and to develop critical analysis of the problems facing the Church in Asia from people on the scene. The opinions expressed are those of the author(s) alone and do not necessarily represent the official policies of the FABC or its member Episcopal Conferences. Manuscripts are always welcome and may be sent to: FABC, 16 Caine Road, Hong Kong. \*  
 \*\*\*\*\*

