

**“50 YEARS AFTER INTER MIRIFICA:  
ASIAN COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES”**

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**I. THE THEOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF SOCIAL MEDIA  
- 50 YEARS AFTER INTER MIRIFICA**

**- Msgr. Paul Tighe, Secretary of the Pontifical Council  
for Social Communications**

**Three Achievements of Inter Mirifica**

The first achievement concerns the fact that, besides the specific content of the Decree, Inter Mirifica is the document which placed communication itself at the centre of Council's discussion. Communication was considered not just an area of study for specialists in the field, but became a fundamental theme for reflection in light of the Church's mission. At first Inter Mirifica was not considered to be of great theological significance, yet it was precisely this characteristic which made sure it was not later stigmatized as belonging to a theology not yet influenced by the developments at the Council. The importance of Inter Mirifica is in underscoring the essential role communication plays rather than in analysing specific themes and topics regarding it.

The second achievement of Inter Mirifica lies in the fact that the document recognizes that, in order to ensure the centrality of the theme of communication within the Church, there is a need to create a special institutional structure for it. In particular, the document stresses the need for a pastoral structure to ensure that the required attention and consideration is given to communication, and that it is given priority in the life of the Church at all levels. Ruzkowsky in his analysis of the Decree suggests such a structure would lead to an indispensable institutionalization of social communication in the Church, which would then translate into official support of all the efforts which before had been spontaneous or unorganized on the part of pioneers engaged in all types of projects around the world. The elements which characterize this institutionalization include the dedication of a special, annual day to celebrate social communication in the Church and the creation of an office in the

Roman Curia to assist in promoting it. The document calls for every diocese to commit a person trained in the field of social communication, and suggests that even bishops should be trained and be competent in the field. The document also calls for the creation of structures at the national level, and at regional and international levels, to coordinate the Church's communication activities. What comes from this is a structure which is rooted in the concept of subsidiarity.

The third achievement regards the "prophetic" intuition of Inter Mirifica in recognizing the social dimension of communication. The document does not speak of the 'means of communication' or 'instruments for dissemination of information', contrary to what was suggested in previous drafts. The choice not to include any specific reference to these issues helped give credence to the fact that communication does not only have a technical function, but also includes the most varied forms of human expression at the artistic level, such as dance, music, etc. The insistence on the social dimension reminds us that communication not only involves transmitting information, but that it is a relational reality which serves to create community and strengthen bonds between persons. I chose to speak about a "prophetic intuition" given that it is clear that the term "social communication" anticipated the turning point in the culture of modern communication with the advent of social media and the emergence of a more informal communicative style, even more deeply rooted in community and relationships.

### **50 years on**

In this intervention, I wish to reflect theologically on the significance of the cultural changes that are being forged by digital and social media. When we think about the changes in communication, what some commentators call the 'digital revolution', it is natural to focus on the technological developments. We are fascinated by the speed with which communication devices are becoming more powerful, smaller, more connected and accessible. While this focus is understandable, the truth is that the most profound change is

not technological but cultural: the real challenge is to appreciate how much is changing in the ways that people, especially young people, are gathering information, are being educated, are expressing themselves, are forming relationships and communities. In 2012, Pope Emeritus Benedict insisted that: *The new technologies are not only changing the way we communicate, but communication itself (World Communications Day Message, 2012).* These changes, moreover, are not just happening ‘outside’ the Church but within our communities and in the everyday experience of believers.

It is obvious that the Church must be attentive to its own theological traditions as it seeks to establish criteria for its engagement with the social media. We cannot rely only on the insights of sociologists and ‘media gurus’, no matter how valid their perceptions, as we seek to develop a strategy for our communications ministry. We must always begin with Gospel of the Jesus Christ, and seek to find ways of expressing to our contemporaries the abiding and ever relevant truth of God’s unconditional love for all people. But as Pope Emeritus Benedict instructed the Pontifical Council: *It is not only a matter of expressing the Gospel message in contemporary language; it is also necessary to have the courage to think more deeply – as happened in other epochs – about the relationship between faith, the life of the Church and the changes human beings are experiencing.... what challenges does “digital thought” pose to faith and theology? What questions and requests? (Address to Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 2011)*

### **Church and Communications**

I would begin by saying that theology should give more explicit attention to communications. When we talk about the communicative mission of the Church, we are not talking about one mission among many others. We are in fact talking about the fundamental reason why the Church exists. The Church exists by the will of God and it exists precisely to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. From the beginning this has been its universal mission. We are called to bring the Good News to the

ends of the earth, to ensure that the Gospel reaches and touches the hearts of people in every part of our world. This message with which we have been entrusted – this Good News – is a Person, Jesus Christ, and we invite others not merely to know about him but to enter into a relationship with him. Good communication is never simply about the exchange of information but about the creation of relations – a truth that is becoming ever more verifiable in the realm of social media.

Today, when we speak of the ‘ends of the earth’, we must remember the so-called ‘digital continent’. As Pope Emeritus Benedict said in his message for World Communications Day 2013: *The digital environment is not a parallel or purely virtual world, but is part of the daily experience of many people, especially the young (WCD Message, 2013)*. For them, digital devices are not primarily instruments to be used but are part of the fabric of their lives. The connectivity facilitated by these devices has reshaped their existential environment and enables them to live their lives in the context of networks and patterns of friendships, association and community that would have been unimaginable until a decade ago. Moreover, these networks have become fundamental points of reference for them in their pursuit of information and news, for self-expression, for shaping public opinion and for dialogue and debate. Given the centrality of the networks and the connected media environment in the lives of people today, it is absolutely necessary that the Church should seek to establish a presence in the ‘digital world’. If the Church is not present, and does not share the Good News in this forum, then we risk becoming marginal to the lives of many and are failing in our mission to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Communication is also at the heart of our daily lives as believers. The Church is a community; it is the gathering of those who have been called together by Christ. Our ‘ecclesia’ cannot flourish, our Church will not be a place of communion and belonging, if we do not foster those forms of communication that promote a sense of connection and participation. We must learn to appreciate the potential of social media to ensure that people are being listened to, consulted by, engaged with and valued by

the Church and their pastors. This is not just a question of customer relations or marketing but of ensuring that the Church *can give witness and voice to the faith of the whole people of God gathered together by Christ (Gaudium et Spes,3.)*

The Church does not only communicate through those formal means with which we are most familiar. Communication is not confined to pulpits, radio, TV, newspapers and the internet; we are rich in these means, but we communicate in every aspect of our lives. Communication is also a fundamental aspect of our liturgies and our celebrations. Communication is effected by how we live our faith, run our schools and hospitals, and treat the poor and vulnerable. Often, the most important communication is the strength of our witness to the Good News – our testimony renders it believable and welcome in the lives of others, or not. It is our life, our liturgy, our attitudes, our approach to people that speaks most loudly, for better or for worse. Social media allows us to see ourselves as others see us. If we are attentive to the comments, criticisms and observations of those who visit our sites and engage with our postings, we can learn much about how we are perceived. We need to understand better how our message is being heard and understood, and how we are seen, by different audiences. We have always, and rightly, focused on the content of our teaching; today we must listen more attentively to our audience, or the multiple audiences we address, and understand their concerns and questions. We need to understand better, and take account of, the contexts and environments in which they will encounter us and the Gospel we seek to proclaim in word and deed.

### **The presence of the Church in the digital world/social networks**

I have already argued that the Church must be present in the digital continent. The real challenge, however, is to establish a presence that recognises and responds to the distinctive culture of that environment. Just as in previous times, missionaries had to understand the culture, languages and customs of the continents they sought to evangelise; so also today, we have to

be attentive to our way of being present, the language we use and how we will engage with the values and dynamics that characterize the networks. When it comes to understanding how we should be present in the digital environment, we need to ask the right question. It is not about how we should use the new technologies to evangelise but rather how we can be an evangelising presence in the new 'world' that has been brought into being by these technologies. *The dynamics proper to "participatory networks" further require that the person be involved in what he or she communicates. When people exchange information, they are already sharing themselves and their vision of the world: they become "witnesses" of what gives their life meaning (Pope Emeritus Benedict, Address to PCSC,, 2011).*

Clearly, believers have a right, and a duty, to be fully active citizens of the digital world, to express their views and to share their deepest convictions. Our presence will only be effective, however, if we are authentic witnesses to our faith. We have to manifest our genuine concern for those we encounter by *listening to them, conversing with them and encouraging them (Pope Francis, Address to PCSC,, 2013)*. We cannot simply bombard people with our 'answers' but must take their questions seriously and allow them to fully express themselves. *A particularly significant way of offering such witness will be through a willingness to give oneself to others by patiently and respectfully engaging their questions and their doubts as they advance in their search for the truth and the meaning of human existence (Pope Benedict, WCD Message, 2013)*. This is particularly important in an environment where any question is likely to attract immediately commercial and ideological responses and offerings. If we allow people to go deeper and to probe further, we help to 'give a soul to the internet'. It is important to remember that we are not ourselves the soul of the digital arena, but our readiness to listen and our openness to the questions of others will enable them to express their deepest personal and spiritual yearnings. In this way, we help to ensure that *the digital world can be an environment rich in humanity; a network not of wires but of people (Pope Francis, WCD Message, 2014)*.

If we take others seriously, show respect for them and their views, and avoid any form of manipulation or exploitation; then we are both offering a consistent witness to our faith in Jesus and helping to humanise social media. This is particularly necessary at a time when many are concerned about the increasingly shrill and violent nature of some of the commentary that is found on social networks. We need to add our efforts to those of other people of good will to ensure that humanity's enhanced capacity for expression and communication realizes its enormous potential to strengthen the unity of the human family, to foster an *authentic culture of encounter*, rather than perpetuate division and rancour.

As our relationships with those we encounter in the social networks becomes more profoundly human, it will become more appropriate and truthful for us to share the deepest source of our hope and joy. *We hold a precious treasure that is to be passed on, a treasure that brings light and hope. They are greatly needed ... The great digital continent not only involves technology but is made up of real men and women who bring with them their hopes, their suffering, their concerns and their pursuit of what is true, beautiful and good. We need to bring Christ to others, through these joys and hopes, like Mary, who brought Christ to the hearts of men and women (Pope Francis, Address to PCSC, 2013).* In the context of a truly human encounter with another person, we would be lacking in authenticity if we did not seek to share the Good News that set us free. We share it, however, as a gift with full respect for the freedom of the other and the mystery that will be at the heart of his or her encounter with Christ: *Within this encounter, there is the person and there is Christ. There is no room for the spiritual engineer who wishes to manipulate (Pope Francis, ibid).*

### **The language of the social networks**

Theologians must assist the Church in finding a 'language', a way of speaking, appropriate to the new media environment created by the technologies and the social networks. This is especially important if we are to be faithful to our mandate to speak to those who are not members of our community - to

other Christians, to those of other religions, to non-believers and to those who are now distant from the life of faith having parted from the Church for various reasons. In speaking of language, I am thinking of our styles of engagement, our means of communication and our vocabulary.

In the first place, we must adjust our style of communication. As Pope Francis has stated: *God is everywhere: we have to know how to find him in order to be able to proclaim him in the language of each and every culture; every reality, every language, has its own rhythm (Address to CELAM, 28 July 2013)*. In the past, the technologies tended to privilege one directional communication: one person or institution broadcasted a message and the audience or public passively consumed it. Today, digital communication requires a more interactive participative style: unless our message engages people who begin to share it, comment upon it and question us about it, it will remain without an audience and we risk talking to ourselves. Unless we take others seriously and enter into conversation with them, we cannot expect them to pass much heed of us or hope to achieve ‘traction’ for our views and ideas. *We have to be able to dialogue with the men and women of today .... We are challenged to be people of depth, attentive to what is happening around us and spiritually alert. To dialogue means to believe that the “other” has something worthwhile to say, and to entertain his or her point of view and perspective (Pope Francis, WCD Message, 2014)*.

Secondly, we need to acknowledge that our traditional mode of expression was very text dependent while the digital culture tends to highlight multi-media content. Words and text are still important but our communication will be more effective if we can also express ourselves with images, video, music and gestures. We need to rediscover the capacity of art, music and literature to express the mysteries of our faith and to touch minds and hearts. Just as the stain glass images of the medieval cathedrals spoke to an illiterate audience, we must find digital forms of expression that are appropriate to a generation that has been described as “post-literate”. We have long been accustomed to telling our story; we can now aspire to show who and what we are. We need to learn to show how we celebrate

our faith, how we seek to serve and how our lives are graced and blest.

Finally, in talking of language we should recognise that much of our Church vocabulary - especially our theological and liturgical terms - can be problematic and confusing for our contemporaries. We are challenged to rediscover simpler words and to use more accessible metaphors if we are to capture the attention of the broader public. Again Pope Francis has expressed this most clearly: *At times we lose people because they don't understand what we are saying, because we have forgotten the language of simplicity and import an intellectualism foreign to our people. Without the grammar of simplicity, the Church loses the very conditions which make it possible "to fish" for God in the deep waters of his Mystery (Meeting with the Bishops of Brazil, 28 July 2013).* The Holy Father, however, expresses this even more powerfully in the witness of his own preaching and his extraordinary capacity to engage people through the use of seemingly simple words, his memorable images and similes and his direct and positive body language.

### **Engaging the culture of the social networks - anthropological dimension**

I believe we should begin by recognizing and celebrating the potential of digital technology and the social media to facilitate human communication, to allow for the sharing of words and images almost simultaneously across enormous distances and with people who might previously have been isolated. This in turn allows people to use the technologies to promote greater understanding and harmony among people, *creating a sense of the unity of the human family which can in turn inspire solidarity and serious efforts to ensure a more dignified life for all (Pope Francis, WCD Message, 2014).* In 2009, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI described these technologies as being *'truly a gift to humanity'* and in 2014, Pope Francis said that the potential of the internet to foster a culture of encounter and solidarity allows us to conclude that *it is something truly good, a gift from God.*

The technologies, however, will not automatically lead to a change for the better: *'Just because social communications increase the possibilities of interconnection and the dissemination of ideas, it does not follow that they promote freedom or internationalize development and democracy for all. To achieve goals of this kind, they need to focus on promoting the dignity of persons and peoples, they need to be clearly inspired by charity and placed at the service of truth, of the good, and of natural and supernatural fraternity'* (Pope Benedict, *Caritas in veritate*, 73, 2009). There is a need for a determined commitment from individuals and institutions if this is to happen. *'It is not enough to be passersby on the digital highways, simply "connected"; connections need to grow into true encounters. We cannot live apart, closed in on ourselves. We need to love and to be loved. We need tenderness. Media strategies do not ensure beauty, goodness and truth in communication. The world of media also has to be concerned with humanity, it too is called to show tenderness. The digital world can be an environment rich in humanity; a network not of wires but of people* (Pope Francis, *WCD Message*, 2014). The Church has an important contribution to make to the culture of the social networks by insisting on the importance of human agency and by challenging those dimensions of digital culture that threaten human flourishing and well-being.

Commentators frequently speak of user generated content with reference to the social networks, but we must remember also that the very culture of the social networks is user generated. If the networks are to be spaces where good positive communications can help to promote individual and social well-being then the users, the people who make up the networks, need to be attentive to the type of content they are creating, promoting and sharing. All of us are aware of cases where social media have been abused, where people have been attacked, ridiculed, had their privacy violated or are being manipulated. There is a role for Governments and International Organization to play in regulating this environment and the large corporations who operate in this space, but there is an equally important moral or ethical obligation on all of us as individual agents to ensure that these environments are safe and humanly enriching. *All users will avoid the sharing of words and images that are degrading of*

*human beings, that promote hatred and intolerance, that debase the goodness and intimacy of human sexuality or that exploit the weak and vulnerable (Pope Benedict XVI, WCD Message, 2009).*

In his address to the PCSC in 2011, Pope Emeritus Benedict drew attention to the example of Father Matteo Ricci and his engagement with the culture of China: *In his work disseminating Christ's message, he always considered individual people and their cultural and philosophical context, values, and language, accepting everything positive to be found in his or her tradition, and offering to enliven and uplift it with the wisdom and truth of Christ.* Even the most superficial familiarity with the culture of digital media and the social networks is sufficient to show that the main drivers of social media are activities related to the human need for connectivity and friendship, the search for knowledge and information, the wish for stimulus, the desire for self-expression and to share, and the hope for guidance and direction expressed in the 'following' of others. All these are core human activities which I believe point to the enduring openness of human persons for an encounter with Jesus. He alone can satisfy the human yearning for friendship and love; he is the Truth who frees us from sin and weakness; he calls us to the fullness of self-giving in love, and he leads his followers to the abundance of life in unity and communion. In leading people to an encounter with Christ, we can also liberate them from some of the risks we can recognise in digital culture: the loss of interiority, a superficial or merely quantitative understanding of friendship, the triumph of emotivism over reason, self-absorption or exhibitionism, and polarization.

### **The institutional challenge - strategy**

In terms of evolving an appropriate institutional strategy for our engagement with social media, we are fortunate that we have within the Church a great wealth and experience in terms of the people who are working with Church newspapers, radio, television and web-sites, as well as those who have been leading the way in social media. I can understand the apprehension of some who are involved with what might be called traditional

media but good communication will always require the skills of professional writers, editors and audio-visual producers. The development of an adequate strategy for the digital world, however, will require that these professionals rethink their way of working. It is not simply enough to take content produced for traditional media and post it on-line. What is needed is more inter-disciplinary collaboration in order to produce material that is truly multi-media and the allocation of resources in such a way as to permit real engagement with those who wish to discuss, question and deepen their understanding of such materials.

We should applaud the efforts of the wide community of Catholic institutions and individuals across the globe who are helping to establish the presence of the Church in the digital world. Their willingness to talk about their work, to honestly evaluate their initiatives and to share their learning and experience provides us with insights and indicators of best practice that can in turn be shared with others.

Another institutional challenge is that we have to learn to communicate in an environment where traditional ‘authorities’ do not have the same influence as they once had. People will no longer pay attention, if they ever did, simply because a Church leader is speaking. We have to learn to command attention more by the quality of our interventions, by our responsiveness to others and by our ability to engage meaningfully with those questions and debates that are already claiming public attention. Part of the challenge for the Church in the area of digital media is to establish a networked or capillary presence that can effectively engage the debates, discussions and dialogues that are facilitated by social media and that invite direct, personal and timely responses of a type that are not so easily achieved by centralized institutions. Moreover, such a networked or capillary structure reflects the truth of the Church as a community of communities which is alive both universally and locally. We should also bear in mind that the Church is both “Roman” and “Catholic” in the sense that it is universal. It is important that we remember both. Rome is a symbolic centre of

unity and a centre of governance. The Catholic dimension, which probably best accounts for the universality of the Church, is the reality that the same Church that is present in Rome is alive and present by the grace of God on different continents throughout our world. What is important is that what is celebrated, what is lived at the local reality, is the truth of the reality of the Church. It is at the local level that the Church finds much of its vitality. It is at the local level that the Church structures reach and touch the lives of so many people..

I believe there is a need for greater theological reflection in the area of ecclesiology. Talking our lead from the work of Avery Dulles, we need to revisit the issue of our models of the Church. We live in an networked society, which sociologists characterize as being 'poly-centric' with people belonging to and attaching varying levels of influence to a variety of networks . In this context, we have to ask if our 'traditional' or 'instinctive' tendency to think of the Church in terms of an institutional model - a unified society with a clear 'mono-centric' authority - is not so removed from the cultural expectations of those we wish to engage as to be unhelpful. I think we can profitably read again Chapter 4 of *Lumen Gentium* which reminds us of the central role of the laity in bringing their faith and the values of the Gospel into all the existential contexts in which they live - *they live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven* (*Lumen Gentium*, 31) and that they will have a legitimate autonomy of action, *By divine institution the Holy Church is ordered and governed with a wonderful diversity* (*ibid*, 32).

### **The personal challenge - conversion**

By drawing attention to the importance of personal conversion, I wish to return to a basic truth of communications. 'Who we are', and 'how we behave', will always speak more eloquently than our words. Our words, our profession of faith and our expression of a desire to share this faith with others, will only speak to others if they come from our hearts. In order to effectively share our faith and our hopes, we must nourish our

own faith in and relationship with Jesus and allow his grace to change us. Conversion is at its deepest a change of heart, a *metanoia*. This will clarify for us whether we are simply members of a sect or true witnesses to Jesus. If our faith is alive in our hearts, and is genuinely a ground for hope in our everyday existence, then it will be natural for us to desire to share it with others. *Be servants of communion and of the culture of encounter! I would like you to be almost obsessed about this. Be so without being presumptuous, imposing "our truths", but rather be guided by the humble yet joyful certainty of those who have been found, touched and transformed by the Truth who is Christ, ever to be proclaimed (Pope Francis, Meeting with Bishops of Brazil, 28 July 2013).*

Here as ever, we remember that good communication begins with listening: we must cherish God's word and meditate on it so that it reshapes us, so that our words will be born from our encounter with the Word. By keeping alive the intensity of our communion with Jesus in prayer, the sacraments and service of the poor, we will become credible witnesses to the power of God's grace and help others find their way to Him. *This is the challenge: to bring the person to Christ. This must be done, however, in complete awareness that we ourselves are means of communication and that the real problem does not concern the acquisition of the latest technologies, even if these make a valid presence possible. It is necessary to be absolutely clear that the God in whom we believe, who loves all men and women intensely, wants to reveal himself through the means at our disposal, however poor they are, because it is he who is at work, he who transforms and saves us (Pope Francis, Address to PCSC, 21 September 2013).*

We must recognise, however, that while we should seek to be professional and committed in our communication mission, that ultimately it is by God's grace and the action of the Holy Spirit that lives are changed and that people come to faith. We should never doubt what Pope Emeritus Benedict called the *power of the word of God itself to touch hearts, prior to any of our own efforts (WCD Message, 2013)*. *As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making*

*it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55, 10-11).vvv*

*Editorial Note: At the time of the 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Bishops' Meet, November 11-16, 2013, Msgr. Paul Tighe was Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications. On 19 December 2015 he was appointed by Pope Francis as adjunct secretary of the Pontifical Council for Culture, elevating him to the dignity of bishop.*



## II. INTER MIRIFICA AFTER 50 YEARS: ORIGIN, DIRECTIONS, CHALLENGES

- Fr. Franz-Joseph Eiler, SVD, Director, Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication

### I. Origin

Not even three months after his election as a Pope (October 28, 1958) John XXIII surprised everybody when he announced a diocesan Synod for Rome and an ecumenical Council for the whole Church on January 25, 1959 at St. Paul's cathedral outside the walls of Rome. Soon after this announcement the first preparations started and there was right from the beginning of the internal commissions in November 1959 a commission "on the means of the apostolate", especially referring to the "new audio-visual techniques" like Cinema, Radio/TV and the Press. One reason for this inclusion of the media right from the beginning was probably also the fact that Pope Pius XII had just one year before his death published on September 8, 1957 *Miranda Prorsus* an Encyclical letter on the electronic Media (Radio/TV, Film) which was still fresh in the minds of people. John XXIII himself had referred to this encyclical extensively in his own first encyclical letter *Ad Petri Cathedram* (June 29, 1959) with some 8 paragraphs (11 -19) treating beside others the duties of the Press, modern means of Communication and their relation to Truth.

Thus Communication entered already at an early stage into the preparations of Vatican II despite the fact that from the themes solicited from bishops and religious superiors including catholic 'Institutions of Higher Learning' like universities for discussion themes at the Council only 18 from a total of 2.150 answers referred to Communication, all of them from bishops and superiors, but none from any of the catholic universities. (Baragli 1969, 94)

The internal pre-preparatory Commission met two times (November 1959/March 1960) producing a written documentation on the matter. Soon after this on May 30, 1960,

the Pope issued the document *Superno Dei Nutu* establishing 10 official commissions for the preparation of different documents to be presented to the council. A secretariat to handle “all questions related to the modern means of social communication, Press, Radio/TV, Film” followed with a document on June 5 of the same year. The members and consultants of this secretariat were 1 appointed including the chairman in the person of Archbishop Martin O’Connor (former Rector of the North-American College in Rome) and Msgr. Andrea Maria Deskur (later Cardinal) as secretary. It was called the “Secretariat of the Press and Film”, different from the earlier “Modern Means of the apostolate”. The members were all either bishops or clergy but came from quite different parts of the world – including one prelate from Manila.<sup>1</sup> This Secretariat had four sessions between November 1960 and October 1961.<sup>2</sup> All meetings of this secretariat up to the final promulgation of *Inter Mirifica* took place in the Palazzo San Carlo within the Vatican which also after the Council remained for many years the main seat for the Social Communication Office of the Vatican. Only in 2007 it was changed to one of the buildings in the Via Conciliazione!

This Secretariat came up with a document of 114 paragraphs: After an introduction there followed sections on: 1. The doctrine of the Church (with 3 subsections), 2. Action and Apostolate of the Church (with 2 subsections), 3. Ecclesiastical Discipline and structure (with 2 subdivisions), 4. Single instruments of Communications with chapters on Press, Cinema, Radio/TV and other means like Comics, Discs, Announcement Boards, etc.

The first session of the Council itself started on October 11 and lasted till December 8, 1962. The very first concern of the some 2,600 bishops/participants at the beginning was the final composition of commissions for the preparation of the

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<sup>1</sup> For a full list of participants cf. Roegele 1964, Footnote 9! The only participant from Asia was Mgr. Giustino Ortiz, Archdiocese of Manila who only participated in some sessions.

<sup>2</sup> 1. November 13-15, 1960; 2. January 24-27, 1961; 3. April 25-28, 1961; 4. October 12-21, 1961 (this one with work groups on different media)

documents for discussion. The original proposals of the Vatican Curia were mostly rejected and had to be reworked or even substituted by theologians ("Periti") of the participating bishops. This, however, did not affect the document on Social Communication which was not challenged and actually could be handled already in the first session of the Council.

After a lengthy discussion on Liturgy, a subject which was prepared well in advance, followed first a discussion of a document on Revelation which was, however, after some time postponed by instruction of Pope John XXIII and to be reworked and taken up in later sessions. Thus somehow unexpectedly the document on "The Instruments of Social Communication" came in. It was discussed by the council on November 23, 24 and 26 with 2,153, 2,133 and 2,136 participants respectively being present in the sessions. At the 28<sup>th</sup> general assembly of the Council on November 27, 1962 the document was put to a vote and out of 2,160 Fathers present 2,138 voted in favor of the text with the following provisions:

1. To approve the text in substance and to affirm that the Council should treat a subject of such importance for pastoral Ministry.
2. Considering the comments of the different Council Fathers, however, it is proposed to shorten the existing text to the essentials of doctrine and general pastoral directives without losing the essential parts.
3. Everything referring to practice and execution of the teachings should be worked out as a special mandate by groups of experts from various nations.

The proposed revision was placed under the Council Commission 10 (Laity). In fact, however, basically the former Secretariat continued to meet at Palazzo San Carlo in the name of this Commission in five different sessions 1962 and 1963 to reduce the original text and re-write the new proposal. The special section on the different media which took more than half of the original document was removed. But also 54 interventions from the floor of the Council as well as an additional 42 more comments which were submitted in writing had to be

considered. One of these came from the that time auxiliary bishop of Krakow, Karol Wojtyla, the later Pope John Paul II. (Composta 1967, 39 f.)

The shortened and finally submitted text was actually not any more an extensive presentation of the field but rather a pastoral orientation. This re-edited text was then included in the material for the second plenary session of the Council from September 29 to December 4, 1963.

The reception of this 'new' text, however, was every else than smooth. A resistance against it built up with the conviction that the proposed text was not sufficient and in the opinion of some had not anymore the quality of a council. There were three American Journalists who published some critical comments on November 16, 1963 and concluded: "This decree, as it now stands, may one day be cited as a classic example of how the Second Vatican Council failed to come to grips with the world around it." These comments were also signed by Frs. John Courtney Murray, Jean Danielou and Jorge Mejia (Baragli 1969, 148, Tav. 23). A similar initiative was taken by a group of some 97 Council fathers mainly from German speaking countries who asked to postpone the final voting and re-examine the proposed text (Baragli1969, 153). They distributed leaflets at the entrance of St. Peter's immediately before the final session on November 25, 1963 with the request to postpone the voting. This was hindered personally by archbishop Felici, the secretary of the Council. It seems, however, that this contributed to 503 "No" votes against 1788 "Yes" votes on that day, the highest No-votes for any document in the history of Vatican II. In the final voting, however, immediately before the official publication of the document on December 4, 1963 there were only 175 No Votes.

The Communication document of the Council was called moralistic, ecclesiastic and without sufficient respect for the work of laypeople in this field (Composta 1967,144, cf. also Roegele 1964,316 ff.). It was agreed, however, that the subject deserved to be treated by a council. In fact some observers stated that one should be happy that the concern "made it"

considering the fact that originally some 70 themes and papers were prepared for submission to the assembly out of which only 13 arrived at a final approval. (Composta 1967, 44).

Another criticism on the council document referred to the lack of theological input. This can be partly explained by the fact that the secretariat for the preparation of the text was mainly composed of bishops and priests who were responsible for communication undertakings but were not really experts in theology. It seems that the theological 'push' of the central European bishops in bringing their own theological experts for the preparation of the other Council documents apparently never reached the Communication Secretariat. This was only somehow rectified seven years later with the publication of the Pastoral Instruction "*Communio et Progressio*" which was demanded by the *Inter Mirifica* Council document (Nr.23).

## II. Position within Vatican II

The Communication Document *Inter Mirifica* was one of the first two documents of the Second Vatican Council. It was published December 4, 1963 at the end of the second session of the assembly. This means, that the following theological considerations and insights of the Council as reflected in later discussions and documents could not have any influence on the published communication text. Thus the so called 'lack of theology' could not be addressed any more. It means, however, that there is still a need to study the remaining 14 Vatican II documents after *Inter Mirifica* under the perspective of communication and the possibility to bringing in a broader vision of the field. Thus e.g. the document on the Church *Lumen Gentium* or the one on Revelation *Dei Verbum* which went through 7 different drafts before it was finally accepted seem to be quite relevant. Revelation is a communication 'activity'. What does this mean for the communicative life and work of the Church? Along the same lines also the final document which actually evolved from the Council fathers themselves and was not prepared by any of those other preparatory commissions: *Gaudium et Spes* seems to be of special importance for the social

communication work of the church which is imbedded in modern cultures and the life and concerns of people of today. It is not insignificant that this document has e.g. a whole chapter on Culture (Nos. 53-62) which is of growing importance in an intercultural world and Communication. But also other texts of the Second Vatican Council present special challenges for pastoral Communication like e.g. the ones on Priesthood (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*), Bishops (*Christus Dominus*) and priestly Formation (*Optatam Totius*). The sending of the Church in Mission (*Ad Gentes*) is a sending for communicating the life and Word of God (Evangelizing Communication)! Priestly and pastoral Spirituality is to be communicative spirituality: only a priest, bishop, Christian who is communicative will reach and influence others! The declarations on Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*) and on religious freedom (*Dignitatis Humanae*) are essential texts for any inter-religious dialogue and proper human communication and interaction!

Cardinal Franz Koenig (Vienna) recommended already 1968 at the World Congress of the Catholic Press in Berlin to the participants to go beyond *Inter Mirifica* and read and study especially *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes* if they wanted to have a proper insight and approach to Social Communication in the spirit of Vatican II. Avery Dulles (1988) has developed five models of the communicating Church on the basis of the different Vatican II documents. But beyond this there seems to be hardly any other extensive study along these lines which should be a matter of great interest for the Church and for everybody who is concerned about proper and theologically grounded communication. The pastoral instruction *Communio et Progressio* (1971) which was demanded by the Council Fathers in *Inter Mirifica* goes a little bit in this direction and might be considered as complementing some missing parts in the earlier document. But even this is not enough for a deeper and thorough understanding and synthesis of the social communication in the understanding of Vatican II.

### III. The Role of Pope John XXIII

In the history of *Inter Mirifica* it is astonishing to see how communication was included right from the beginning of the preparations for the Second Vatican Council. Apparently the pope himself had a special personal interest in this field.

Already Pope John XXIII's predecessor Pope Pius XII had an extensive interest and concern for the different means of communication. He not only has many speeches and addresses to communication people (cf. Eilers 2011, 77-121) but also published important documents with his *Ideal Film* (1955). About a year before his death he published September 8, 1957 the Encyclical *Miranda Prorsus* which is devoted to the electronic media: Radio, Television, Film. The memory of this last bigger document of his life was still fresh in the minds of people when he died. In fact some argued that because of this there would be no need for an additional document of the Council. Such a situation could not be ignored by his immediate successor Pope John XXIII who followed October 28, 1958. In fact John XXIII himself has not only in his first encyclical letter *Ad Petri Cathedram* (June 29, 1959) an extensive section on the duties of the Press and modern media of communication (Nos. 11-18). He also created within the Vatican on February 22, 1959 a "Pontifical Commission for Film, Radio, Television" which following an *Inter Mirifica* proposal (19) was extended by Pope Paul VI April 1964 to all means of Social communication.

Pope John XXIII showed also his personal and special interest in the proposed Council document on social communication through a personal visit in one of the sessions of the preparatory secretariat. On October 19, 1961 he went to the Palazzo San Carlo within the Vatican, where the secretariat was in session and stayed 1 ½ hours with the members of the group, discussing beside others also the relation between art and morals. One of the participants also later remembered his word that for him personally the language of the heart would be more important than the one of words. (Baragli 1969, 114)

When the final proposal of the Communication document was discussed and voted upon at the Central Committee for the Council on April 3, 1962 the Pope once again devoted a longer part of his speech to especially this document and its concerns. In fact he had personally studied and read the text and wrote some remarks on the side of the draft, like e.g. calling the proposal for national communication offices and respective structures as “optime” (Baragli 1969, 116; Tavola XVII). At this occasion he also referred to his own announcements (cf. Eilers 2011, 123-133) and the two communication encyclicals of his predecessors Popes Pius XI (*Vigilanti Cura*) and Pius XII (*Miranda Prorsus*).

From all this one must conclude that the Council document on Social Communication was of special personal interest to Blessed Pope John XXIII.

#### **IV. Teachings and Approaches**

Looking at the teachings of the council document it might be good to be aware of the different translations available in English: Usually the translation of Fr. Austin Flannery OP (1975) is used which seems, however, to reflect a less positive approach to the text. Thus he translates e.g. as the purpose of *Inter Mirifica* (no.2) “that it is the duty to *treat the main problems* posed by the means of Social Communication” while the official Vatican text reads: “to *treat the principle questions* linked with the media of Social Communication” which sounds more positive. Instead of Flannery’s “birthright” of the Church to use and own these media (3) the Vatican translation talks about “an inherent right of the Church to have at its disposal and to employ any of these Media insofar as they are necessary or useful for the instruction of Christians and all its efforts for the welfare of souls.”

In general *Inter Mirifica* seems to be only an outline on Church and Social Communication because of the document’s reduction from a longer and more extensive text presented originally to the Council. Basically the text underlines the right of the Church to own and use means of communication proper to her ministry (3). In a similar way also the moral obligations of the members of

the Church as well as those involved in media production are underlined. The right to information is confirmed (5) as well as the role of public opinion (8). Further it is “the responsibility of all Christians, but especially also the “pastors of souls”, Priests and Religious to develop a proper use and support especially for Church related means of communication (13-17). Many of these things actually had been expressed already in earlier Church documents, but here they receive the authority of a Council.

More important, however, for the future of communication seem to be the following facts, proposals and initiatives which reflect a special permanent concern of and for the Church:

1. With *Inter Mirifica* it is the first time in the history of the Church that an ecumenical *Council* discussed and published a document on Social Communication and thus underlines this as an essential concern for the Church.
2. The document proposes a central office for Communication in the Vatican and also consequently national *offices for Social Communication* for Bishops’ Conferences, guided by a commission of bishops and a bishop appointed. The same is proposed for every diocese where the bishop is finally responsible for all Church activities in Social Communication, including those of Religious. (Nos. 21,20)
3. A *World Day of Communication* is established, the only such initiative taken by the Vatican Council. The day is celebrated annually (since 1967) with a respective theme which the Pope selects and on which he comments with a special message. With this over the years quite a body of Church ‘teaching’ on Social Communication is being built up. (No.18).
4. The publication of a more extensive *pastoral Instruction* is demanded (No.23) to be elaborated by a group of experts which led to the extensive “Pastoral Instruction” *Communio et Progressio* (1971) with 187 paragraphs, a document considered as one of the bests even beyond the catholic Church. It was 20 years later followed by another ‘pastoral instruction’ *Aetatis Novae* to commemorate and extend the document from 1971. (No.18)

5. The expression *Social Communication* is introduced for the Vatican II document "*De instrumentis Communicationis Socialis*". First it was more a common expression for the different means of communication like Press, Radio etc. but later extended in a broader way, going beyond the "instruments" as the "Communication of and in human Society".
6. The need for proper *formation and training* in use and application of communication in Ministry is strongly stressed (13-15), repeated also in *Communio et Progressio* (111) and other documents but up till now hardly developed in a systematic and integrated way especially in pastoral ministry. The same holds for proper research and academic work by catholic institutions of higher learning and universities (cf. C&P 113; 184/185) Social Communication is still seen as a field for some specialists ("hobby") but not as a common concern touching all areas of human life and society - which was actually confirmed by the Council fathers who considered this field as being worth and important to be discussed and part of an ecumenical Council!

## **V. Professional Consequences and follow up**

*Inter Mirifica* gives clear directions for a proper structure of communication within the national Bishops' Conferences and also for international cooperation between these on continental and regional levels. This, however, is not yet followed in some places even after 50 years! In a similar way also proper *formation programs* in communication as proposed by the document which should also go beyond single media use (skills!?) are almost nowhere a regular part of priestly and religious formation which is more than simple technical 'training' ("how to use..."). Academic studies in pastoral communication and related fields are still very sporadic. The University of Santo Tomas in Manila (UST) with a regular MA and Licenciante program in Communication Theology is probably still an exception.

The development of the *concept of Social Communication* as a field broader than technology and single media but as an essential part of any human living and society still needs to be further promoted and developed. It is basic for any Church ministry to develop *communicative persons*, which is essential for the life and growth of Christianity and the Church. Communicative persons are the bringer of "new" Evangelization! An awareness of this communication dimension of pastoral ministries is still very cryptic and not really in the awareness of many Church leaders and members.

## VI. Challenges

From all this, there are some more and special challenges coming up for further considerations and developments which should be considered:

### 1. *From Instrumentality (Media) to "Social Communication"*

The official title of the document *Inter Mirifica* is: *Decretum de instrumentis Communicationis Socialis*. On first sight it seems to be a text on the *instruments* (Media) and their use. Fr. Enrico Baragli sj, one of the authors of the document spends in his "Alance de los terminos" (1966, 39-72) several pages to explain what this expression "instrumentos" means and justifies its use. In fact the expression has been part of the title of the document right from the beginning of the preparations through the Council till its proclamation in December 1963. Unfortunately it was never really explained and clarified. Only when Pope Paul VI followed the proposal of *Inter Mirifica* to erect with "In fructibus multis" April 2, 1964 a special Vatican office for communication the "instruments" were dropped from the title and only "Social Communication" remained. According to Fr. Baragli this was done "per comodo di brevità", just for brevities sake which can rightly be questioned. In his explanation of the different words of this expression he seems to indicate already that the new expression in general terms would open the whole field more to sociology, theology and morals instead of getting stuck with single means of communication, like Press, Radio, TV or Film.

This in fact was one of the strong criticisms of the German Communication scholar Otto B. Roegle already end of 1964 in his extensive study of *Inter Mirifica* where he stated that only the title of the document looked professional but the content not at all. "The concept of social communication", he wrote, "is understood to be in sociology, communication science and social philosophy as one of the top creative elements ("Vegetationsspitzen") for research and teaching"<sup>3</sup> but "unfortunately not much (of this) can be seen in the text of the decree. Instead the 'communication process' appears in *Inter Mirifica* in the old understanding of working from top to bottom, or as a monologic approach ("Hinsage") which might be fitting for the traditionally organized authoritative society" but "certainly not for today's society where communication takes place in form of give and take, as 'Dialogue in society' which is also reflected in the means of communication..." This was written after the final publication of the document end of 1964<sup>4</sup> (Roegle 1964, 317 f.) Thus already at that time communication scholars moved away from single media to a broader understanding of communication in human society which was - despite the title of the Decree - apparently not fully understood by respective Church people. Thus the "instrument mentality" continued also in many follow up documents and the real meaning of "Social Communication" as the communication *of* and *in* human society was not much developed.<sup>5</sup> This changed,

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<sup>3</sup> ("Der Begriff der sozialen Kommunikation gehoert in Soziologie, Zeitungs- bzw. Publizistikwissenschaft und Sozialphilosophie zu den Vegetationsspitzen von Forschung und Lehre.")

<sup>4</sup> The German communication scholar Walter Hagemann defined already 1958 communication ("Publizistik") as the "public sharing of actual things from peoples mind" ("Oeffentliche Aussage aktueller Bewusstseinsinhalte") and his successor Henk Prakke talks already (1964) about communication as "Dialogue of Society". Here is no word about media or technology but rather human society stays at the core exactly at the time of the Second Vatican Council!

<sup>5</sup> Even after "*Inter Mirifica*" Church documents used the new expression just as a common word for the different mass media but not in a broader perspective. Fr. Baragli himself still used the expression 'Mass Media' in a longer article on 10 years after the publication without mentioning "social Communication" but commenting in

however, with Pope John Paul II when he in his Encyclical Letter "Redemptoris Missio" (1990, No.37c) talked about a "new culture" created by communications which needs also an answer from the Church. In today's new world of "social media" and "social networks" the expression "social communication" takes on a new and important meaning as the overall heading for a field which is finally also recognized by the Church but still needs much more "investments' in research and practice.

## 2. From 'Instrumentality' to Communication Theology

Something similar can be said for the theological approach of the document *Inter Mirifica* which seems to be missing for many. Attempts have been made for a "Theology of Communication to somehow 'baptize' the Media and thus place them also into the garden of the Church or reclaim them for her use. In reality, however, communication is to be seen as a theological principle: the whole of theology can be considered under this perspective. Theologians like Martini, Haering, Rahner, Greshake, Dulles, and others have pointed in this direction and developed the field: the Trinitarian God *is* communication, Father, Son and Holy Spirit communicating with each other and we are created in this image and likeness. The whole Bible, the First and Second Testament are books of God's communication with and of his creatures. The high point of this is the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the master ("perfect Communicator") and "*Urbild*" of Communication. The Church is called not only to *use* Media but

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a footnote (nr.30): "In this essay I have preferred to use this term (Mass media) instead of the longer and more exact 'instruments of Social Communication', bearing in mind that to many readers this terminology of the decree is not familiar, as it is (or should be) among Catholics" (Baragli 1974). This remark is the more astonishing as it was according to Card. Andrea M. Deskur (at the Plenary of the Pontifical Council for Social Communication 2004) was Baragli who proposed the new expression ("Social Communication") to the Secretariat for the presentation at the Council. A footnote at the beginning the official document in the hands of the Council members actually defended the new expression 'Social Communication' because words like 'mass media' would not sufficiently reflect the concern of the Church in this field (cf. Eilers,2011, 136 ff).

to be herself in everything she does a reflection of God's communication into the here and now of every time.

### 3. *From pastoral methodology to Disposition*

Over the years there is quite some literature on how to use the 'Media' for pastoral ministry and quite some formation houses and seminaries had "training" courses on how to properly use these Media. In reality, however, this is very often seen and experienced as a welcome break for students and seminarians in the monotony of their studies but does not really 'form' them. Social Communication, however, is rather a challenge for a proper *formation* of the candidate, an inner *disposition* and not an outside attitude or a 'skill'. It is the communication Spirituality which is based on a total openness to God, to Self and Others which is decisive and forms the foundation to become a communicative person which is required for any pastoral minister. Such a disposition is, however, not only needed for seminarians but also for priests, any secretary of a parish and also bishops.

### 4. *From Structure to Spirit*

The Council document *Inter Mirifica* confirms and describes earlier proposals for national and diocesan communication offices starting with the Vatican itself. These structures are up till now after 50 years only partly developed and in place. But also here one has to keep in mind that structures alone do not guarantee the proper and effective use if they don't have proper programs and especially communicative persons to develop a vision in proper individual situations. It is finally not the structure but the Spirit which moves the Church. In a similar way the Church and her institutions are often identified as and with institutions but in reality they are supposed to be living communities which presuppose communicative persons. Maybe we are also not enough concerned about proper formations and academic study programs to develop and equip such personalities...

## 5. *From Isolation to Integration*

In the pre-conciliar preparation for *Inter Mirifica* the group of the secretariat was divided into workgroups according to Media: Press, Radio-TV, Film. The main part of the proposed original document reflected this with more than half of the text devoted to these Media. Already the two encyclical letters on communication before Vatican II were devoted to special Media with Pope Pius XI on Film and Pope Pius XII on electronic Media. It was only through the Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio* which was decreed by the Council that a broader perspective beyond single media was considered with communication as a reality of human society. The tendency for single media, however, continued also after that. Thus almost all exhortations of the Popes after synods have a section on communication but often again referring to single Media or generally Mass Media as one activity of the Church instead of integrating the communication dimension into all pastoral and evangelizing activities of the Church. The same holds for our teaching of Theology where Communication is considered a separate subject but not as a dimension of *all* Theology like e.g. the bible as communication of God to us, or faith as a communicative experience challenging us in the world today like in Fundamental Theology, or the Church as a community and communicative body (Ecclesiology), human and divine communication as norm for behavior (Moral Theology)....

## 6. *From Means and Media to Social Communication in its full sense*

After the application of the expression: "Social Communication" as common word for all "Media" the real full meaning of this as "communication of and in human Society" has to be developed. Almost all communication documents of the Church are still media but not *social* communication oriented with communication as the essential life line of human society which includes e.g. also traditional ways and means of communication like music, dance, theater, storytelling and all forms of oral communication as well as also the modern technical means (Internet) which make everybody their own editor, writer,

producer and commentator reaching all parts of the world in an instance...

The full meaning, value and power of all communication in society (“*Social Communication*”!) is apparently still to be discovered by the Church and all of us! There is a first indication for this, however, in the approach of *Communio et Progressio* where after Theology the first main part over almost 100 paragraphs talks about the role of Communication in human society in general and the contribution of the Catholics to Communication is treated extensively only in the third and last part of the document....

#### 7. From ‘Essentials’ of *Inter Mirifica* to modern times

The Council document *Inter Mirifica* has been blamed in negatives many times as e.g. in an editorial of the London *Tablet*, one of the oldest catholic weeklies in Europe, as “the embarrassingly poor decree on the mass media” because it was one of those made by the Roman Curia and it was apparently not enclosed as one of those which instead of being endorsed by the council fathers who “swept almost all of it aside and started again” (October 6, 2012). This does, however, not mean that the Council document is useless, as some people say...

The fact stays that the majority of the Council fathers underlined the importance of the means of Communication in the modern world and declared the treatment of social communication by a council as important. This fact is not changed after 50 years but rather challenges us to take up the essentials and place them into a proper theological but also cultural and social perspective where communication is the lifeline of everything, personal and communal... In a way we have to repeat the process of “aggiornamento” of the Council into our life today. This might include beside a deeper theological foundation e.g. a review and further development of *Communio et Progressio* approaches in a fresh Christian look on the role of communication in society and Culture today and the formation of really communicative persons and spirits. No New Evangelization will be possible without that!

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### III. FINAL STATEMENT

*The FABC-Office of Social Communication held its 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Bishops' Meet on November 11-16, 2013 at Caritas Centre, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The meeting was attended by 33 participants, including twelve bishops, national secretaries of social communication and delegates from thirteen Asian countries. The resource persons were Msgr. Paul Tighe, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Rome, Fr. Franz Josef Eilers SVD, former Secretary of FABC Office of Social Communication, and Bishop Henry D'Souza of Bellary, India, member of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) Office of Social Communications.*

*The small but vibrant Cambodian Catholic Church accorded a warm welcome and provided a conducive setting for a fruitful discussion on social communication in the Church in Asia. Interaction with the members of the Catholic community in the country, a concelebrated Eucharist with the clergy, religious and Faithful, a fellowship meal and cultural program as well as visits to historical and tourist sites enabled the participants to have a glimpse of the country and the Catholic church in Cambodia and the challenges it is facing.*

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The theme of the FABC-OSC 2013 assumes particular significance in the context of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Vatican II Decree *Inter Mirifica* (IM). The participants were enriched by the inputs provided by the resource persons on the historical background and the salient features of IM, which among other things, officially adopted the expression 'social communication.' In an age characterized by social media networks, this expression has today assumed particular significance and its adoption by the church may be considered prophetic. The Council through the IM also gave to the universal Church a positive vision of communication, established the World Day of Communications, urged the Bishops to assume responsibility for communication ministry.

The assembly noted the rich and timely resources on social communication offered by the Church's Magisterium especially since the Vatican II. Of particular significance is the commissioning of a more comprehensive document on social communication, published in 1971 under the title *Communio et Progressio* (CP). This Pastoral Instruction provided a well grounded theological foundation, clear direction and focus on social communication in the Church. CP is considered the *magna carta* of Church's social communication. Since the first World Day of Communications in 1967, the Church has through the Pope's messages, continued to teach and inspire the universal Church on a variety of themes pertaining to social communication.

In the light of such a setting the Bishops' Meet 2013 deliberated upon and acknowledged the important issues and tasks emerging from IM:

1. The Second Vatican Council recognized the paramount importance of social communication in the Church.
2. The Council with prophetic intuition chose the expression social communication to designate the church's communication.
3. IM reaffirmed the Church's conviction that the "instruments" of social communication are truly 'marvelous gifts of God'.
4. IM paved the way for the formation and establishment of structures at various levels in the Church such as the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, and recommended the establishment of national offices. It underlined the need to recognize, promote and strengthen various associations for communication.
5. IM affirmed the role and responsibility of the Bishops in giving due importance and direction to the ministry of social communication.
6. It emphasized the need to provide suitable formation for all sections of the Faithful in social communication, and to seek the

collaboration of the laity in supporting the communication ministry of the Church.

7. It called in particular for a greater emphasis on the formation and training of the church leaders, especially those in formation in social communication in view of their ministry.

8. It called for meaningful celebration of the World Communication Day and to promote the message of the Pope for the occasion.

9. This year's Bishops' Meet recognized the need to develop appropriate plans at the diocesan, regional and national levels to coordinate, guide and direct the communication ministry so as to help effectively communicate the Gospel in our rapidly evolving communication environment.

10. The participants emphasized the importance of studying and implementing IM in the light of the other Conciliar documents, especially *Dei Verbum*, *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes*, as well as the subsequent pastoral instructions *Communio et Progressio* (CP), *Aetatis Novae* (AN), World Communication Day messages of the Popes, etc. Together they provide the theological basis for understating God as a Triune communicating God and provide the doctrinal and pastoral foundation for communication ministry.

### **Recommendations**

Much has been achieved in these 50 years since the promulgation of IM that we wish to acknowledge and thank God for as a result of the selfless dedication and hard work of various individuals, lay, religious and priests as well as offices and organizations in this area of social communication. The Church in Asia has itself been much blessed through the establishment and development of offices of social communication at the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), national, regional and diocesan level in line with the recommendations of IM and other related church documents.

1. As part of the ongoing effort to strengthen and consolidate the good results obtained thus far in the area of social communication, further initiatives need to be taken. In particular, we recommend the establishment of necessary structures wherever they do not exist. These structures should be at the service of the mission of the Church and enhance the effectiveness of the social communication ministry of the church in Asia.

2. We underline the importance of a Pastoral Plan for social communication as a vital instrument for effectively carrying out our communication ministry. Wherever pastoral plans are already in place, there is need to revisit them so as to ensure that they are effective and relevant for the times and adequately reflect the spiritual and pastoral priorities of the church's social communication. Wherever such plans do not exist, there is an urgent need to create them in line with the current communication environment and the pastoral needs of our continent. The pastoral plans for social communication should outline the vision and mission of the Social Communication Commissions beginning at the continental, national, regional, diocesan levels. In evolving such plans it is important to adopt a participatory approach involving all the stakeholders. This will ensure greater ownership and commitment in the implementation of the plan.

3. The pastoral plan for social communication should not be seen in isolation but must become part and parcel of the various pastoral priorities of the Church, thereby integrating communications into all aspects of the church's apostolate (cf. AN, no. 21). This also demands that we consider the impact of emerging realities in the area of communication such as media convergence.

4. The church's communication ministry needs to focus more purposefully on larger concerns affecting our continent and the nations we represent. This calls for greater coordinated efforts in the areas of formation, planning, resource management and utilization, research, production and other interventions. Such

coordinated approach calls for greater sense of solidarity and cooperation.

5. It is necessary to evaluate the communication structures and services they render in a serious and systematic way. The FABC-OSC and national offices could play a key role in assisting such evaluation and study. Such evaluation should go beyond mere quantitative achievements and must verify whether they meet the vision and mission of such structures and offices. Regular feedback and evaluation can help verify the relevance of our communication ministry in an increasingly digital world. The pastoral and spiritual nature of the communication ministry, though at times intangible, should not be overlooked while undertaking such evaluations.

6. Considering the importance the church gives to social communication, it is essential to assign the task of leading communication at various levels to persons who are deeply imbued by the spirit of Christ the Good Shepherd. In addition to technical skills and competence, he or she should possess the spiritual and pastoral qualities that can motivate, inspire and reach out to people. Persons appointed to key responsibilities in the communication ministry of the church must have the knowledge, aptitude and commitment for such a ministry. In considering persons for appointment to various responsibilities to lead communication, it is also recommended that they are given sufficient time to prepare themselves for the task, and undergo necessary training and formation prior to taking up their responsibilities. Our communication ministry should be aimed at facilitating the sharing of a message, which is grounded in the Person of Jesus Christ, the Word of Life, to whom individuals are called to make a personal response. The example of Pope Francis in establishing contacts with people and reaching out to them in love is an inspiring model for all Christian communicators to emulate.

7. Consistent with the teachings of the church on the importance of the formation of the pastoral personnel in social communication, we strongly recommend that there be a serious

and systematic program of formation of seminarians, religious in formation, priests and religious in ministry and lay persons. Such a formation program should go beyond imparting of technical skills, but must pay attention to the formation of a truly communicative person who has the necessary disposition rooted in Christ and the Trinitarian and Incarnational model of communication, capable of “giving oneself in love” (CP, 11).

8. Considering the diverse pastoral contexts of Asia, the FABC-OSC members should strive towards greater collaboration expressed through sharing of resources, personnel, as well as best practices in the communication ministry. National offices under the leadership of the bishops should ensure that the various communication organizations such as Signis, Catholic Press Associations etc work in a spirit of unity and collaboration. While maintaining their identity and mission, they should function within the framework of the overall pastoral plan for social communication and the directives and guidelines of the Bishops and Commissions responsible for social communications. (CP, no. 143)

9. We need to situate Catholic communication ministry into the cultural contexts of the people. Learning the languages and the cultural values of the people and interpersonal communication are essential even as we continue to be engaged in mass media and other forms of communication.

10. The youth are a powerful resource in the continent of Asia. The participation and involvement of young people as active agents of social communication presents an exciting opportunity and a challenge. Youth are not to be viewed as passive consumers of content but active agents in the ever evolving communication environment. It is important for communication leaders in the Church to assist, facilitate and also learn from the youth so that they can make their rightful contribution to the Church’s communication ministry and to society in general.

11. World Communications Day offers us a unique opportunity to promote the Church’s vision of social communication. The communication leaders should encourage and promote the

celebration of the Day with greater involvement and participation of the Bishops, Pastors and Lay Faithful. Besides celebrating the event within the precincts of the Church, it can also provide an opportunity to offer pastoral care to communicators including media professionals. As recommended by CP, the Faithful should be exhorted to contribute towards supporting the communication ministry of the Church (no. 100).

12. Following the recommendation of CP, due attention should be given to strengthen the functioning of the office of Public Relations (no. 174). We also underline the specific role of the Spokesperson and the structures and persons to deal with Crisis Management. These functions and services should form important components of the social communication ministry of the Church.

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