

Sixth Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guide

**THE CHURCH IN ASIA AND THE MINISTRY OF THE MEDIA
AND THE ARTS AT THE SERVICE OF LIFE¹**

“You Love All That Exists, Lord, Lover of Life” (Wis 11:24, 26)

by
GASTON ROBERGE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Life is worth living.....	1
Part One: There is a gap between what we can do and what we want to do in the service of life.....	2
Part Two: Some aspects of life requiring pastoral attention	7
Part Three: Adjusting our plans to what we can do.....	9
Conclusion: Life is worth serving.....	15

INTRODUCTION: LIFE IS WORTH LIVING

Some time in the mid-nineteen-fifties, young Bishop Fulton Sheen gave a very successful series of television talks. “Life is worth living” was the title of the series. The success of the talks was due, no doubt, to the bishop’s personal charisma. But there was another reason for their success: the talks met a profound need in the audience for a message of life. And the message was delivered in a way people could respond to. The bishop had mastered the art of touching the hearts of millions of viewers. He knew that in using the so-called mass media one must address the heart of each individual.²

It is striking that forty years after Bishop Sheen’s television talks we seek to express a similar message of trust in life through the ministry of the media and of the arts.

This discussion guide has been prepared for the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC), convening at Manila, Philippines, January 10-19, 1995. The theme of the Plenary Assembly is: “Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life.”

For too many of our contemporaries "life is not worth living." That is why so much is done against life. In some parts of the world where murders are common occurrences, "life is cheap."

And yet, we know, each person's life is worth the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus.

Today, we Catholics feel that our Christian vocation demands that we be and live still more fully at the service of life. What a marvelous vocation: to serve life, Life, the Lord of life!

In our reflection we examine how we can best fulfill this vocation in and through the communication media and the arts.

As we begin our reflection, we are greatly encouraged by the fact that some Catholics are today amongst the greatest media personalities of our time: Pope John Paul II, Mother Teresa, among Church personages. And there are lay persons too, like Dominique Lapierre, for instance, with his books *The City of Joy* and *Beyond Love*. We are also encouraged by the fact that the African Bishops' Synod has made communication one of its five priority themes.

PART ONE: THERE IS A GAP BETWEEN WHAT WE CAN DO AND WHAT WE WANT TO DO

However, there is a big gap between what we actually can do as Church and what we want to do. At times we speak of the media ministry as if we owned the media, as if we were a great communication power. Our vocation is sublime, it is true, but our means limited.

For lack of familiarity with the media, perhaps, we formulate pastoral plans which do not really work. As a result, we bemoan our inability to "use" the great media and reject them as a *massa damnata*; and we glory in our own media productions, limited as they are to our own faithful. Either way, we fail to reach out. Hence, the gap between what we perceive as our inalienable vocation, and what we actually do in fulfillment of that vocation. This paper raises basic questions. Answering them should help bridge the gap. The paper does not deal with theories or with texts, biblical or pontifical, but with the ground realities of our media ministry. It is assumed that the relevant texts have been considered carefully.

1. The Church, A Trustworthy Communicator?

The first question concerns the essential condition for any communication, namely, trustworthiness. When she introduces herself as a

communicator, is the Catholic Church in Asia a trustworthy partner? And, does she appear to be such?

When a Catholic says she wants to serve life through the ministry of the media and the arts, can she be trusted? That is, does she have a hidden motivation? Is she not anxious to serve with other people of good will only as long as service leads to evangelization?

And does not evangelization appear to many an Asian as a strategy to ensure the triumph of the Gospel message over the messages of Buddhism, of Islam, and of Hinduism?

Cannot evangelization mean the proclamation of the Gospel message along with the messages of Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism to a world which, cut off from transcendence, sinks into practical materialism, and loses both its sense of God and morality?

There are countless Catholics — priests, religious and lay persons — sincerely open to dialogue with other religions and wishing to serve life along with them. But their aim remains evangelization, and evangelization often means conversion to Catholicism. If people feel that we finally want to convert them, then the basic condition for communication is lacking. They cannot trust us.

What would a Hindu gather from the Church's own report on evangelization? Would he not come to the conclusion that, whatever particular Catholics may say, the aim of the Church is evangelization, and evangelization is work towards conversion?³ If that be the case, it would be better if the Catholic Church were to make her stand clear for all to know. Otherwise, she will only create distrust. But is the Church's motivation that simple?

On the other hand, priests and religious often feel uneasy if they cannot affirm that their primary motivation is, if not to convert people to Catholicism, at least, to make them know and love Jesus. From a communicational point of view, this causes a grave problem. The priest, perhaps, is not at peace with himself, especially if he hides his motivation in order to appear to be disinterested. He may then fear to appear to be hypocritical and, in the process, he may well appear to be such.

St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, the patroness of the missions along with St. Francis Xavier, never used the word "conversion" in her writings — except twice: once, referring to her own conversion and, the other time, regarding a public sinner. She always spoke of making Jesus known and loved. And that indeed is the aim of all Christian endeavor. But how is

that aim fulfilled? Can one strive towards it and still remain disinterested?

The answer to this question lies in Thérèse's realization that, in her own words, "Jesus is not alone." With him are the Father and the Spirit. It is not enough for a Christian, therefore, to know and love Jesus. For he made himself known so that we may know his Father. And on earth Jesus is on a mission. We cannot love him unless we too "serve" with him. His service is the establishment of his Father's Kingdom, a kingdom of truth, love and justice, which extends much beyond the fold of the Church to include all men and women believing in God but belonging, by God's design, to diverse religions. All men and women who exert themselves for God's Kingdom are in some way "disciples" of Jesus, which in no way makes of them crypto-Christians.

It is easy to test our attitude. When, for instance, we refer to Hindus as our brothers, do we mean what we say? Again, is a Muslim really our sister? Or just someone to win over?

Unless the bipolarity of motivation and disinterestedness is resolved, there can be no hope of a healthy communication with other religions and of service along with them. If that is true, then the formulation of a pastoral theology of communication may well be the most urgent task challenging the bishops of Asia. It is not primarily a matter of content but a matter of intent.

Not so much a matter of approach, however much required inculturation may be, as a matter of purpose. A first step might be to distinguish the various aspects of the Church's communication, whether *ad intra* or *ad extra*: official, sacramental, dialogical, prophetic, catechetical, educational, artistic... But in every respect we must ask ourselves how to temper holy zeal with discretion. *Caritas discreta* is indeed a gift of God. It has a collective and an individual dimension.

2. Who Says What, To Whom, Through What Channel,

With What Effect? ⁴

The next question regards the communication ministry itself: WHO speaks in the Church? WHAT is said? To WHOM? In what MANNER? Through what CHANNEL? With what EFFECT? Only after answering these questions shall we be in a position to examine specific areas of the service of life that require pastoral attention and plan accordingly.

a) WHO speaks in or on behalf of the Church? The answer is obvious: the Holy Father and the bishops. When it comes to matters as difficult as those pertaining to life, there is no place for lay people to speak, except to

repeat what has been said by those in authority. Notwithstanding all that we say about the essential role of the laity in the Church and especially in the media world, when it comes to speaking in or on behalf of the Church today lay men and women have absolutely no *locus standi*.⁵

How can we ever find more appropriate ways of communicating the doctrine to the people of our time,⁶ if our lay collaborators can only “transmit” what has been defined, especially concerning moral issues? These issues are difficult not only because they are complex and require deep study, but mostly because the Church’s position on them meets with firm dissent even within the Church, especially among moral theology teachers. In such a situation a great communication skill is required. It is unlikely that such a skill can be developed within the Church without the active involvement of the lay people.

b) **WHAT is said?** In matters concerning life, mostly “no.” No to abortion, no to contraception, no to euthanasia, no to same-sex love, no to genetic engineering, no to masturbation, no to premarital sex, no to temporary marriage, no to the use of preservatives (condoms) by spouses, even when one of them is infected with HIV, no to pornography, no to suicide, no to dissent!⁷ One is not saying here that the Church should not say “no,” one is merely taking note of the fact that, unfortunately, the Church appears to say mostly “no.” And that makes her relationship difficult with her intended audience. “Appears,” it was said, because, in fact, the Church has compassion. But, again unfortunately, the media play up the “no” and play down the “yes” to life, which the Church always proclaims, especially through her various services of the needy.

c) **WHOM does the Church address?** Mostly the Catholics. Indeed, the Asian Church has access to few mass media. Her own media are rarely used to reach out of her own fold. In spite of inviting lay men and women to be Church in the media, the Church leaves these lay persons with little to say. Nor does she provide them with the tools required to communicate in today’s world. On the other hand, it is not always possible for lay persons working in the secular media to voice the message of the Church. For the great media of film, press, radio and television are not instruments to be used at will, but large and powerful institutions created and maintained to serve specific interests. These very institutions are themselves in need of evangelization.

We can test our attitude towards our ministry of the media. Just consider, for instance, Radio Veritas Asia. RVA is for many an Asian Church the only means of mass outreach. Do we consider it a gift of God? Whom do we seek to reach? Do we approach our listeners as a “target” to evangelize? Or do we come to them as brothers and sisters to join them in

the service of life? The use to which Radio Veritas Asia is put by the Churches is a good indication of these Churches' pastoral priorities. What is Radio Veritas Asia used for by our various Churches? What funds and personnel are expended for that ministry by each diocese of Asia? How is that ministry integrated in pastoral plans?

d) **In what MANNER** does the Church address her elected public? Answer: in a highly formal manner. One can appreciate that when the Holy Father addresses his fellow bishops, he may wish to use a particular traditional style: direct admonition, affirmation of authority, reference to ancient authors, the whole address suffused with biblical quotations which to an ordinary reader may seem to add little intelligence or credibility to the text. But when, in turn, the bishops address their faithful, should they not, in the words the Holy Father had for moral theologians, "look for a more appropriate way of communicating the doctrine of the Church to the people of their time."⁹

The usual Church style is inappropriate for the people of our time, whether Catholics or, a fortiori, Hindus, Buddhists or Muslims.

e) **Through what CHANNEL** does the Church address the world? In practice, through what channel does a bishop address his people? The situation varies widely from place to place. Yet, in general, Catholics being a minority in several areas of Asia, a bishop may have only a small Catholic newspaper, and he may write letters to be read from the pulpit in churches. In many instances, bishops are not in a position to address the world beyond their own flock. This already puts a severe limitation on our desire to serve life through the ministry of the media and the arts.

Our lay people are in a better position to engage in this service. But they can do that only in collaboration with other people of good will. And then, how does a Catholic collaborate with other good people on issues related to life, on which the Catholic Church's stand is known but not accepted by these other good people?

f) **What is the EFFECT** of the Church's communication with Catholics and with others? On the issues related to life, in most instances, the effect is to strengthen dissent. Worse still: some Catholics who have great respect for the Holy Father and the bishops have stopped listening. They ignore the Church's statements altogether.

This, then, is the situation we start from when we seek to serve life through the ministry of the media and the arts. Nothing would be more harmful than the illusion that because we have a sublime mission, we can do great things. The reality seems to be: our credentials are questioned,

our message is demanding, our instruments of communication are few and undeveloped and our style needs *aggiornamento*, an updating.

The gap between what we can do and what we want to do has first to be acknowledged and its extent measured. Only then can we adjust our objectives to the pragmatic demands of feasibility. Yet, before we attempt to do this, we have to survey, however sketchily, some of the life-related problems which require pastoral attention.¹⁰

PART TWO: SOME ASPECTS OF LIFE REQUIRING PASTORAL ATTENTION

The issues related to life are so wide-ranging and so numerous that no pastoral plan can address them all. Choices have to be made, on the one hand, according to available material and human resources, and, on the other hand, in keeping with the particular problems experienced in a diocese.

Only a list of some issues is given here. It is given by way of a reminder and does not claim to provide any new information. Indeed, there are enough problems; one need not add to the list. The issues can be conveniently grouped according to the aspect or level of life concerned. But, obviously the division is more logical than real. And there are other useful groupings too.¹¹

1. The Social, Economic and Political Aspects

In our Asian countries not a few people live in sub-human conditions, socially, economically, or politically. As Pope John Paul II said, when speaking to slum dwellers in Brazil, "Faith tells us that it is not God's will that his sons and daughters should live a sub-human life."¹²

Women, children, especially girl-children, "dalits," tribals, are discriminated against in many ways.

Slum and pavement dwellers in cities, the poor in villages do not have enough food, mentally and spiritually. They do not live in a habitat where they can develop fully as human beings.

People in Asia, and probably everywhere, spontaneously have a healthy relationship with the environment.¹³ But they mostly stand helpless in front of the massive and systematic destruction of the physical environment.

Often political systems do not permit each individual full and responsible participation in political life.

All that "is not God's will."

2. The Mental, Intellectual and Spiritual Aspects

Often people do not have access to the cultural wealth to which they are entitled by birth, let alone access to basic education to which they have a right and without which they have little hope of personal development.

3. The Medical and Moral Aspects

This last aspect has to do with the transmission, the termination, the preservation, the enhancement and the enjoyment of life. It is by far the most complex and difficult aspect.

It is made the more complicated from the moral point of view by a number of developments or trends, some of which are:

- hedonism as the aim of life
- demand for instant gratification
- affirmation of unbridled freedom
- the struggle for gender equality
- the breakdown of the family cell

Some of the issues:

a) **Genetic engineering.** According to newspaper reports, it is now possible for couples to ascertain the gender of their unborn child and abort if the gender is "wrong." Thus, sex-selection abortions have surged. It seems likely that soon scientists will discover the genes responsible for numerous traits of human beings, like height, weight, IQ, skin pigmentation and others. This too will prompt parents to go in for abortion if the unborn child does not have the desired traits. The fiction of "Jurassic Park" is less chilling than reality.¹⁴

b) **Euthanasia.** For an increasing number of people the maintenance of life beyond the apparent limits of one's ability to withstand suffering appears senseless. Paradoxically, a greater appreciation of life leads some of our contemporaries to reject any apparently diminished form of life.

c) **Free sex.** Whether before or after marriage.

d) **Same-sex love.** Between both males and females.

e) **Drug Addiction.**

f) The HIV pandemic.

– protection of youth

– care of persons with HIV/AIDS

Ninety percent of HIV-infected people live in the developing world. In 1991 only 6 percent of the money spent worldwide on HIV prevention was for the Third World. Paradoxically, but, in fact, not surprisingly, the global response to the pandemic is decreasing.¹⁵

g) **Suicide.** It is reported, for instance, that in Quebec the highest cause of mortality among youth is suicide. Other parts of the world need not wait for this acute situation to develop before they care for those youths who, jobless, have lost confidence in any institutions, including the Church.

PART THREE: ADJUSTING OUR PLANS TO WHAT WE CAN DO

We wish humbly to serve. But service is not a word to be used lightly. Jesus came (and remains with us) not to be served but to serve. He was sent. So also we are called. We are not “free-lance” workers but, strictly, servants.

In the first part of this paper we looked in some detail at our media ministry. In the second part we had a panoramic view of some of the life-related issues that require pastoral attention. Our limited means and the immense task to be done might dishearten us, if it were not for the fact we just mentioned: we are called to serve. He who has called us will give us light and strength.

**1. Inculturation of the Moral Doctrine of the Church
Urgently Needed**

Our contemporaries find the moral doctrine of the Church difficult to accept, and the manner of expression of the doctrine adds to the difficulty. An explication of moral freedom based on the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine is not likely to impress our people, not even, perhaps, our clergy. And to buttress with the Code of Canon Law¹⁶ an affirmation of the Church’s “right always and everywhere to proclaim moral principles” is not likely to gain an enthusiastic assent from those who already question that right. As the Holy Father himself has emphasized,¹⁷ the inculturation of the moral doctrine of the Church is most urgently required. A letter like *Veritatis Splendor* will remain in splendid isolation, unless each region, or even each diocese, inculturates at least some parts of the letter. This inculturation can be done, for example, through our radio programs, newspapers, letters to the faithful, seminars and training programs.

2. There Are Other Moral Teachers Too

But a bishop is not the only person seeking to guide the conscience of his people. Apart from the ambient culture generally,¹⁸ a bishop has two formidable opponents: the political order and the market order with its advertising campaigns.

The political order constantly seeks to convince its constituents that particular courses of action are right and just. The effort at convincing people is directly proportional to the number of persons whose rights are denied by the action under consideration. Thus, in certain circumstances, it is very difficult for a person of good will to discern what is right and what is wrong.¹⁹

The other contender to guiding people's conscience is the present market economy. Economic values have superseded all other values. Only what sells, only what can bring in some income, is recognized to be of any value. As a matter of fact, the old liberal humanism, with its set of values, is gone, perhaps forever. The youth whom the Church addresses have not been exposed to those values. Hence, it would be next to impossible for them to accept, let alone understand, prescriptions based on these values.

3. The Heart of the Problem

In *Veritatis Splendor* the Holy Father has identified and analyzed the source of most problems related to the ordering of life in this world: a belief in the absolute autonomy of human reason. From this belief derive morally wrong acts.

This suggests that any affirmation of the wrongfulness of these acts will meet with dissent and will be counterproductive. On the other hand, the doctrine and position of the Church on moral issues have undoubtedly to be asserted for the benefit of those who are prepared to receive it. That is required to strengthen them and comfort them.

Should not a pastoral plan, therefore, concern itself first with those beliefs that make the Church's teaching unacceptable and even unbearable, perhaps to the majority of our Catholics, and certainly to the majority of humankind? One way to do this is media education.

4. The Youth and the Media

Media education can greatly help the youth especially to gain freedom of judgment and a critical appreciation of the values proposed to them by

the communication media. In particular, our youths watch hundreds of acts of violence on television. As a result, their sensitivity to physical violence is blunted. Violence is now taken as the ordinary way of settling problems. Indeed, it is accepted as a way of life. Media education can help the young to cope with the violence they witness on television.²⁰

The importance of the communication media suggests that media education is now a necessity. The Asian Churches may consider making media education a priority ministry. Excellent work is already being done. But in the light of what was said earlier about the values which exalt human freedom and which are spread by the media, a fresh impetus may need to be given to media education everywhere in Asia.

Media education is itself a manner of communication. More than any other, it requires inculturation. The media educator offers a "meta-discourse" on the media. Unless she can do it in the very language of the media, she is not likely to draw and retain the attention of her audience, let alone help them "consume" programs usefully. The media educator needs a good amount of audio-visual material for analysis, and she must have the ability to create and use audio-visual aids to convey her meanings. Above all, she must have a positive attitude towards media programs. It is here that the necessary "no" of the Church mentioned above can be so detrimental to communication. The media are the "natural" environment of youth. They must survive and live in it, finding sustenance in it. It is from within it and through it that they must journey towards God.

5. Radio Veritas Asia: A Unique Opportunity

With regard to the use of mass media by the Asian Churches, it seems that the first media to reflect upon is Radio Veritas Asia. Two sets of pastoral issues may be considered: a) Radio Veritas Asia as a broadcasting institution, and b) the various language services.

a) **RVA as a broadcasting institution.** What image of itself does it project in its broadcasts and in its printed material? Does it appear to be the radio of Asian Catholics, or the radio of Church leaders? Does the phrase "RVA, the Missionary of Asia" reflect a theology of service, or can it be interpreted as a call for conquest? Does the logo representing Christ on a broadcasting antenna relieve the doubts of our Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim brothers and sisters?²¹

Perhaps, the pastoral role of RVA needs to be reformulated from time to time to keep the formulation in line with the pastoral orientation of the Asian Churches.

b) **The various language services.** The bishops are showing ever increasing interest in RVA. Efforts have been made in the past to launch a common program for the different language services. Perhaps, this should be done again. While respecting the different pastoral needs of the Churches, perhaps a general orientation could be accepted by all concerned, so as to give a common thrust to RVA. The service of life is certainly an appropriate area for such concerted pastoral communication.

The situation varies from place to place. Yet, whenever practical, as many Catholics as possible should be involved in this ministry. This would help foster in them a sense of the Church being in the service of life in Asia. The involvement might be: preparation of programs, publicity, field surveys.

Radio Veritas Asia is a unique opportunity. If we do not use it properly, then what are we talking about when we claim to be a Church giving a service to life through the ministry of the media and the arts?

6. AIDS: Calling for the Compassion of Christ

The AIDS pandemic has met with a beautiful response from the Catholic Church all over the world. Caritas Internationalis, in particular, has given priority to this action area ever since 1987.²² In Asia we have plenty of opportunities to serve life with other people of good will in connection with the pandemic. The challenge is to make *Christ's compassion felt by those who need it most*. The need for *caritas discreta* is most felt in this area. Much as we may regret it, our Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim brothers and sisters having HIV or suffering from AIDS may be indifferent to or even annoyed at being told by a Christian that Jesus loves them. But they may be deeply comforted by being told by a fellow Hindu, for instance, that God loves them. Are we prepared to collaborate in the making of a television spot, for example, where a well-known Hindu would tell her largely Hindu audience that God loves those among them who are directly or indirectly affected by the HIV pandemic? Or shall we demand that the name of Jesus be "proclaimed on the house tops" as a condition for our collaboration? Can we not paraphrase the old scholastic maximum *quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur*, "whatever is received is received according to the receptivity of the receiver," into saying that any recipient of communication can receive only what he is prepared to receive? Since there is only one God, can we not see that when God's love is received, then the love of "the God and Father of Jesus Christ" is received? Do we not believe in the continued incarnation of the Word of God? Do we ever remember the thirty years of Jesus' "hidden life"?²³

7. A Pastoral Plan Might Comprise, Among Other Things:

a) Formulation of a **pastoral communication theology** based on the Church's tradition, but sensitive to the specific contexts of Asia, with its specific ways of living as well as its sufferings, but open to the world and to modern modes of communication and the culture they create.²⁴ In particular, the purpose of Church communication requires formulation. If the purpose is said to be "evangelization," then this latter word has to be defined in terms understandable by a Hindu, a Muslim and a Buddhist. Failure to do this will make "communion" with others impossible. And our Christian discourse will be a sublime monologue.

b) **Inculturation** of important Church documents, like *Veritatis Splendor*.

c) **Mandatory media education** in educational institutions, from primary schools upward, in parishes, in non-parochial clubs or organizations, in non-Church institutions, etc.

d) An **intense reflection on the ministry of Radio Veritas Asia**, comprising the formulation of the pastoral role of RVA in the light of the adopted pastoral theology of communication; a review of present programs across the fourteen language services to assess their suitability; formulation of pastoral guidelines for each language service; time-bound plan to increase involvement of each diocese by way of finance and personnel.

The audience of each language service should be considered as the "flock" entrusted to the bishops of the region concerned.

e) In the HIV pandemic, a **time-bound plan** to:

- identify those who most need Christ's compassion through our specifically Christian ministry or, with our support, through other people's ministry
- train social and health workers to deal with persons having HIV/AIDS
- open information and counselling centers. Experience from Africa can be drawn upon.
- spread basic information in all our institutions; this requires a good amount of audio-visuals, some of which may have to be produced by our care, etc.

f) Be prepared to **speak out locally and regionally** to protect life where

it is endangered. This would go a long way to dispel any false notion that the Church only says "no". For instance, the inter-Church Coalition on Africa (ICCAF) addressed a letter to Lewis Preston, President of the World Bank, stating that, "For the World Bank, health care is not a basic human right (...) but a scarce commodity to be allocated according to the ability to pay." Then, the ICCAF states its position:

We believe that health is a basic human right. It marks the dignity of the human person. Health care must, therefore, be made available to all, regardless of race, class, gender, age, ethnic origin or ability to pay.... Good health and health care policies can only emerge in an environment where it is accorded primacy, along with education.²⁵

g) The role of the various Church-run communication centers in a region may be **occasionally reformulated** in the context of the above.

h) Here is a table of some of the media and arts. It may be useful for **each diocese** to alter it or augment it according to the situation prevailing in that diocese.

MEDIA & ARTS (Specifically religious/others)

- Painting; dance; architecture; sculpture; music

- Printed:
newspapers (ours/not ours)
posters
leaflets; folders; stickers
T-shirts or other carriers
flip charts
books
pastoral letters

- Recorded sound:
radio (ours/others)
audio cassettes
discs

- cinema:
films

- photography:
photos
slides

- video:
video films (for non broadcast use)

- Television:
 (ours/others)
 regular/occasional programmes
- Performing arts:
 theater (plays)
 sight and sound shows
 street theater

CONCLUSION: LIFE IS WORTH SERVING

Faced with problems such as those related to life and with our limited means, it might seem that we cannot do much. In fact, if we have that feeling, it is just as well. We receive the communication media as "gifts of God" rather than as "powerful means." Our hope rests in God alone and in his spirit. We use all possible means and, indeed, we would be ashamed if we were found to be sluggish in our service of life through the media. But we have no illusions. We know the task facing us; we know our resources.

On the other hand, as the previous section shows, there is a lot that we can and should do. That may not be what we had anticipated. But, then, our concern is not primarily with problems but with people who experience problems in their earthly journey. Our only desire is "that Christ - through our humble ministry - may walk with each person the path of life."²⁶

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Is your personal theology of evangelization consistent with the teaching of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*?
2. Realistically, what pastoral emphasis is placed upon the ministry of the media and arts: in the parishes, dioceses, and national Catholic ecclesiastical structures of your country bishops' conference? First place? Second?...Little or none at all? (A brief national report would set the context of the workshop discussion.) What principles of action can be drawn from these reports?
3. What resources exist in trained personnel, media facilities, local and national structures of collaboration, etc?
4. How is your country/conference using Radio Veritas Asia? Local and national radio and TV resources?

5. Do your expectations about the use of the media/arts flow from a "Church-centered" mentality, from a "Kingdom-centered" mentality?
6. What about "value-formation" through the media/arts?
7. What do you think about the "basic human community"?
8. How is your Local Church using the arts?

FOOTNOTES:

1. This paper was written by a person who has lived half his life in India. His view of Asia, therefore, is myopic. This limitation is acknowledged and, indeed, regretted. The ministry of the arts is mentioned in the title because of its importance, but it is not discussed at length here because it would require a separate treatment. There is some involvement of the Catholic Church in the arts in some parts of Asia. Some interesting work is done in theater at both the levels of mass dramas, usually biblical, and of so-called "street theater," dealing in general with social issues.
2. That was much before the late Pope Paul VI wrote about that in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975): "piercing the conscience of each individual... implanting itself in his heart as though he were the only person being addressed" (no. 45).
3. Conversion is our first preoccupation, at least officially. That was made very clear in a recent document, *Trends and Issues in Evangelization in India*, 1994. The first words of the document concern the dwindling number of conversions and of baptisms. In his book, *Missionaries in India, Continuities, Changes, Dilemmas* (New Delhi: ASA Publications, 1994, xii, 305 pages), Arun Shourie tells the story of his encounter with this text and with those who wrote it.
4. H. Lasswell's old communication model, around 1948, (itself reminiscent of the still older scholastic forensic maxim, "*quis, quid, ubi, quibus auxiliis, cur, quomodo, quando?*") itself having a flavor of the five Aristotelian causes: "who says what, where, through what channel, with what effect?", for all its limitations, can yet serve as a starting point. The model, of course, is concerned with the process of communication rather than with the meaning involved. It also implies a mechanistic view of the effect of the process.
5. The Holy Father has insisted on that fact:
The task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether in its written form or in that of Tradition, has been entrusted only to those charged with the Church's living Magisterium, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ" *Dei Verbum*, no. 8. Quoted in *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 27.
6. *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 29
7. The Vatican has launched a new scientific academy called "the Pontifical Academy for Life." The members must affirm adherence to the Church's teaching on abortion, contraception, euthanasia and other issues, says Cardinal Fiorenzo Angelini, President of the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance for Health Care Workers. (*The Universe*, UK, 6 March 1994; *International Dateline*, New York, June 1994). See also *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 113.
8. Pastoral Instruction on the Means of Social Communication, "*Communio et Progressio*" (1971) no. 2, quoting the late Pope Pius XII.

9. *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 29.
10. What is said here of the media mostly applies to the arts as well. For, the line dividing media and arts is often tenuous. However, a separate treatment of arts is advocated because of: (a) the particular relationship between art, culture and faith, especially the use of symbols to express faith; and (b) the training and work of the artist are special issues.
11. In *Veritatis Splendor* (no. 80), the Holy Father quotes this passage from the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes* (no. 27) in which are listed acts against life:
- Whatever is hostile to life itself, such as any kind of homicide, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and voluntary suicide;
 whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, physical and mental torture and attempts to coerce the spirit;
 whatever is offensive to human dignity, such as sub-human living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution and trafficking in women and children; degrading conditions of work which treat laborers as mere instruments for profit.
12. Pope John Paul II to the slum dwellers of Alagados (Brazil), quoted in *Paths of Mission in India Today: Our Common Search*, 1994, CBCI Commission for Proclamation and Communication: Working Group, no. 20.
13. "By birth and tradition we have a respect for nature, for Mother Earth who carries and feeds us, for waters that quench our thirst, and for the sacredness of forests, rivers and mountains. Nature dictates the places and timings of prayer.
- All citizens need to be made conscious of their responsibility for their environment, the preservation of planet earth as home for the generations to come, in short, for *making the quality of life for everyone today and in the future the priority criterion of all activity.*" (Emphasis is mine) *Paths of Mission*, no. 9.
14. Amrita Bazar Patrika, Calcutta, 5 June 1993-4. A report by Andrew Kimbrell.
15. *Children Worldwide*, Geneva, International Catholic Child Bureau, special issues: *Aids, Children Too*, Vol. 20, no. 2-3, 1993, p. 7.
16. *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 27.
17. Theologians are encouraged "to look for a more appropriate way of communicating to the people of their times," *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 29.
18. "A comparison between the Church's teaching and today's social and cultural situation immediately makes clear the urgent need for the Church herself to develop an intense pastoral effort (regarding the relationship of man's freedom and God's law)," *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 84.
19. A good example of such a circumstance was that of the Gulf War. In a speech to the nation, President George Bush affirmed: "This we do know, our cause is just, our cause is moral, our cause is right." In fact, this he knew, a large section of his nation felt that his cause was unjust, immoral and wrong. Yet, he won over the assent of not a few by highlighting the report stating that some of the enemy troops were raping innocent women. That, obviously, had to be stopped (State of the Union Address, January 29, 1991). The speech weaves important themes and values, like family and community, into the argument. Quoted by Abouali Farmanfarmanian, "Sexuality in the Gulf War: Did You Measure Up?", in *Genders*, no. 13, Spring 1992, pp. 1-29.
20. In a study carried out mostly in 1989 in eight countries 256 programs were analyzed. Fifteen programs were from Indonesia, and sixty-five from Malaysia; the average per country was thirty-two. Researchers found that the percentage of these programs in which there was shown violence was as follows: Bangladesh 17.97; India (with at the time only

- Indian programs) 72.22; Indonesia 66.67; Malaysia 20.00; Japan 73.08; Pakistan 85.71; Philippines 100; Thailand 94.12. (Vijay Menon: "Violence on television: Asian data for an Asian standard," in *Intermedia*, Nov/Dec 1993, Vol. 21, no. 6, pp. 40-43.)
- "Faced with such a situation a media educator, for instance, can seek to change the impact of violent images by deconstructing the techniques used to stage violent scenes on television. She can uncover and challenge the cultural, economic and political supports for media violence – militarism, greed, competition, dominance, structural poverty..." Elizabeth Thoman, Center for Media and Values, Los Angeles, USA, in *Educommunication News*. Brussels, June 1994, no. 27.
21. Of course, it can be argued that few people, except Christians, will recognize the image of Jesus. If that is the case, the logo may need to be reconsidered.
 22. Fr. Robert J. Vitillo, "The Catholic Church's Response to the Pandemic HIV/AIDS", in *Children Worldwide*, Geneva, International Catholic Child Bureau, NN 2/3, 1993, pp. 18-19.
 23. In relation to the HIV pandemic there is need of all sorts of communication materials to spread basic information and to foster positive attitudes: posters, flip charts, stickers, T-shirts, radio and television programs, video tapes, etc.
 24. See Michel Philippart, "La communication: une priorité pour le Synode Africain," in *Information Bulletin*, Catholic Media Council, 4/1993, pp. 6-9.
 25. The entire letter is reproduced in "Third World Network Features," India and Malaysia, no date.
 26. *Redemptor Hominis*, no. 13 and *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 7.

Published January 1995

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, G.P.O. Box 2984, Hong Kong.

