

Social Communication at the Asian Synod

A Documentation

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The "Special Assembly for Asia" of the Synod of Bishops from April 19 to 15, 1998 followed similar continental assemblies for Africa, Europe and the Americas. These assemblies are complementary to the Universal Synods of Bishops which were introduced by Pope Paul VI in the follow-up of the Second Vatican Council. The special continental assemblies are also to prepare for the Great Jubilee in the year 2000. Till then, with the synod for Oceania (November-December, 1998) and Europe (1999) still to come, all continents of the world will have had special assemblies. Such synods are occasions to consider in-depth the situation, needs and possibilities for the Church in those continents. The participants get to know each other better and strengthen cooperation in common concerns. For the Holy Father and Roman Curia, they provide an opportunity to better know the people needs and expectations of these countries.

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

The "Lineamenta"

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

"Not to be underestimated in the rapid changes taking place on the Asian continent is the impact of the mass media. Pope Paul VI seeing its far reaching effects described it as a most powerful means of social transformation (Apostolic Letter, Octogesimo Adveniens 20). Where the mass media has made many positive contributions to development to the many countries in Asia, the beneficial effects can sometimes be outweighed by the fact that these means are liable to be manipulated by those with vested interest. In some cases, the media is controlled by powerful political, economic and ideological forces. Since the mass media can sometimes be a means of cultural invasion, undermining the traditional religious and family values in Asia, education and formation as to their use is very important (cf. John Paul II, Letter to the Delegates of the FABC Vth Plenary Assembly Bandung 1990)"

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

Beyond the Mass Media the *Lineamenta* speak of God's *self-communication* (nos.17 ff.) in mission, Christ's mission as *communicating* Divine Life (No.26) and the mission of the Church as deriving "from God's own *communication* of His Trinitarian Life to the Church"(No. 27, cf. No.29). In the sharing of

communion, the need for dialogue in ecumenism (No.28) is underlined and again mentioned as a "path of Evangelization". The mission of the Church is described as one of *dialogue*: "Dialogue is a part of the work of Evangelization because it is a means of mutual knowledge, enrichment and *communication* of the saving message and life of Jesus Christ (cf. *Redemptoris Missio* No. 8)" (No.33).

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

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

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

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

The "Instrumentum Laboris"

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

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

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

Similar considerations are repeated more in passing in the demand for people of all faiths to address the crises posed by globalization and economic situations and counter values which are promoted by "the *media pressure* of an alien 'pop' mono-culture. Despite being a 'little flock', the Church in Asia is called to address and respond to such sweeping issues. Many times this will involve programs of dialogue and

cooperation with other religions" (No.39). "Some responses are concerned that the *power of Western media and advertising industry* are producing a universal 'mono-culture' which threatens to drive traditional Asian cultures to extinction" (No. 50).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The "Renewal of Prayer Life" in Asia (No. 48) refers to the "elements of Asian spirituality "being in crisis and endangered through modern culture". This contains a special challenge for communication: how to *support existing values* and how to promote and defend them in such a way that they reflect Asian culture and at the same time "communicate Christ" (cf. 2nd FABC Plenary, Calcutta 1978).

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

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

4. The possibilities, challenges and needs of the Church for Social Communication in Asia are summarized in the special section No. 53 of the *Instrumentum Laboris* on **The Means of Social Communication**. (1)

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

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

Responses further maintain that the communications explosion in Asia through satellites, Internet, video-conferencing, etc., raise a new challenge for evangelization. Pope John Paul II states in the encyclical letter "Redemptoris Missio," the means of social communication "have become so important as to be for many the chief means of information and education, of guidance and inspiration in their behavior as individuals, families and within society at large. In particular, the younger generation is growing up in a world conditioned by the mass media" (46). The Holy Father then asks, "Since the very evangelization of modern culture depends to a great extent on the influence of the media, it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate that message into the new culture created by modern communication. ... The new culture originates not just from whatever content is eventually expressed, but from the very fact that there exist new ways of communicating with a new language, new techniques and new psychology" (47). How far is the Church in Asia responding to these "new ways"?

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

- 1) the Church in Asia needs to *increase her presence in the world of the mass media* in order to communicate the Gospel message as well as the social and moral teachings of the Magisterium;
- 2) the Church needs to *enter into the "modern areopagus"* through the means of social communications in order to *evangelize society and transform*, through the values of the Gospel, the new culture being shaped by the means of social communication; and
- 3) all Church personnel, both clerical and lay, need to receive *adequate exposure and training in the use of the mass media and means of social communications*. At the same time, the Gospel must be brought into the lives of those who control and those who are engaged in the mass media in different ways.

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

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

The chapter on "Church as Communion" (VI), as central theological grounding of the whole document can not be fully understood without seeing *communication* as a theological principle and essential to create communion. There is no Church as communion and communion of communities (FABC) without proper communicating with God and between the members of the community *ad intra* and *ad extra*. Thus very often 'Communion' and 'Communication' can be equaled which would for example read in the section on the Ecclesiology of Vatican II (No. 35): "The Church as *communication* is founded on Trinitarian *communication*. She is the sign and binding force of *communication* between God and humanity. She is a *communication* of all the disciples of Jesus, and she is the locus and symbol of *communication* among all peoples." In applying this to the three-fold dialogue of the Church in Asia with the poor, other religions and Asian cultures this should "provide the concrete manner for announcing (*communicating*) the person and message of Jesus through acts of love and service. Such a dialogue (*communication*) would also inspire and provide a method for the Church's mission" (No.37).

The 'Special Assembly'

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

The Special Assembly of the Synod itself lasted from April 19 to May 14, 1998 and the proceedings were structured like other Synods before. After interventions from some 260 participants in the first part, where Pope John Paul II was always personally present, followed the 'Circuli minores' for further discussions and on questions put by the Synod Secretariat. From the eleven workgroups, eight were in English, two in French and one in Italian. Their membership was mixed from the different parts of Asia and the Roman Curia. Their first reports were presented in the Synod Hall in the presence of Pope John Paul II on May 1. The proposals of these groups were later unified, consolidated and voted on to be placed before the Holy Father for incorporation in the final document to be published after about a year.

This process is accompanied by a post-synodal commission with three members appointed by the Holy Father and others selected by the synod assembly representing the different parts of the Asian continent.

The Interventions

In the first phase of the Synod at least seven interventions were exclusively concerned about Social Communication, especially the Mass Media. Already on the first day of the interventions (April 21) there were three presentations on communications, somehow setting the tone.

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

Archbishop John P. Foley, President of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, pleaded for a strong press and appreciated the role of news agencies for sharing experiences within Asia and for Asia to others. A new tool for communication is now available through the Internet with which the message of the Church can enter directly into individual homes. *Vatican Radio* and *Radio Veritas Asia* broadcasting in many languages to different Asian countries can also reach people who don't have free access to the Church. Four actions are proposed for the effective presentation of the message of Christ: (1) Bishops should have active communication and Public Relations offices; (2) They should prepare competent Catholics in the field of Social Communication; (3) There should be ecumenical and inter-religious cooperation to guarantee access of religion and religious values to the media and secure there

respect for moral values; (4) On the national and diocesan level, bishops should develop a pastoral plan for communications and secure the communication dimension in all pastoral activities.

Bishop Ramon B. Villena from Bayombong, Philippines reported in a very personal way about his experiences with *radio for evangelization*. Traditional ways like parishes, schools and charitable institutions are not any more enough. The most convenient and cheapest way to reach people is the *radio*. In the same way that God gave the Roman Roads to the twelve apostles, he gave today the airwaves to us. Also non-Christians are hungry for God and the best way to reach them here and now is through radio.

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

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

On April 27, 1998 **Ms. Annie Lam Shun-Wai**, President of the East Asian Catholic Press Association (EACPA), backed up a call to support the press apostolate in China. The proclamation of the Good News in China through writings has proven to be effective. Though restricted under government censorship, the Church press in China can still produce religious books and periodicals. Beside the two officially recognized publishing houses also some dioceses have newsletters and bulletins. Many Catholics in China are eager to know the universal Church but access to information is difficult. There is lack of trained editorial personnel. But radio, like *Vatican Radio* and *Radio Veritas Asia*, is of special help. In communicating with the Church in China, it is important that: (1) Information is accurate, balanced and objective; (2) Language of publications and Church documents must be simple; (3) Reprinting of selected materials and translations of foreign literature on religious formation and spirituality is needed especially for sisters and laity being engaged in teaching catechism.

Beside these interventions, exclusively devoted to Social Communication or Mass Media some others touched on these or related concerns. Thus **Fr. Henry Barlage, SVD**, the Superior General of the Divine Word Missionaries, referred in his intervention for China to the need for affordable Bibles and asked that great attention should be given to the apostolate of the press, with generous Church

investment in the printed word and communications, including communications in Chinese language on the Internet. Also translation projects should be supported.

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

The 'Circuli Minores'

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

Thus the *French group A* (Reporter: Bishop Reinhard Marx) insisted that the "cultural context to be taken into account and be reflected in certain means of communication." *English group B* (Reporter: Bishop Arturo Bastes, SVD) stated that "'creative' ways of announcing the Gospel are those inspired by the Holy Spirit such as ... the use of the media of social communication". *English group E* (Reporter: Bishop Francisco F. Claver, SJ) demanded that "more creative ways of proclaiming the Gospel have to be found. The use of the modern media of communication is encouraged, but also that of traditional ones like puppetry, street drama, songs, mimes etc." *English group H* (Reporter: Bishop Jacob Mananadath) said that "the creative ways of announcing the Gospel were suggested by a life of witnessing, direct proclamation of the Word of God the means of communication such as radio, TV, Asian art and culture, comics etc. In communicating the Word, signs and symbols, stories and images that are familiar to the Asian mind are to be used."

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

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

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

- * *Asian Integral Pastoral Approach (AsIPA)*, Basic Ecclesial Communities, Gospel and Bible sharing;
- * Tele-dramas and Bible classes for youth;
- * Public prayer of the Office and the Angelus in Churches; ...

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

As results from the interventions and 'Circuli Minores' discussions, some propositions and recommendations on Social Communication emerged "for a more effective presentation of the message of Christ and his Church" which include the following points, which seem not to fully cover the richness and nuances of many interventions yet:

- * To have an active communications and Public Relations offices in every diocese.
- * To secure the formation of priests, seminarians, religious and lay professionals in Social Communications.
- * To provide Media Education for the critical use of Communications Media in Catholic schools and parishes.
- * Seek ecumenical and inter-religious cooperation in the access of religious values to Media and secure in communications media respect for the moral values of Asian Cultures and religions.
- * Pastoral plans must be developed on the Bishops' Conference and diocesan levels.
- * The use of alternative means of communication especially those emanating from Asian cultures should be studied and encouraged.

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

The Final Message

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

* The understanding of Mission "that all may have life and have it abundantly (cf. Jn 10:10)" has "its source in the Blessed Trinity. This life is communicated to us by Jesus, the Son of God, sent to save all humankind from Sin, Evil and Death... " Therefore the Word of God should have central place in our lives and should nourish us spiritually ..."

* "All Christians have the duty to proclaim Christ ... " *"Many creative ways*, in consonance with Asian cultures, were suggested to present Jesus to our sisters and brothers ... "

* "We are all aware that the *Liturgy* has a key role in Evangelization. It is an event where people may touch God and experience Him as the one who takes the initiative to meet them. This evokes our response in adoration, contemplation and silence. For this, however, the liturgy must be participatory. The gestures should convey that something solemn and holy is happening ... "

* "...The Church in Asia is called upon to enter a triple *dialogue: a dialogue with the cultures of Asia, a Dialogue with the Religions of Asia and a dialogue with the peoples of Asia*, especially the poor. To carry on such a dialogue, *formation for dialogue* is all-important, especially in our formation centers."

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

"A pastoral plan for Social Communications should be made in all dioceses so as to include a Public Relations office. Due attention should be paid to Media Education, the constructive use of the Media, such as Press and Publications, Television, Radio and the Internet. The Media is rightly called the modern areopagus, and it is here, as in other fields, that the Church can play a prophetic role and, wherever necessary, become the voice of the voiceless"

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

Conclusion

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

In a continent where Christians are in most countries a small minority of one or two percent of the total population or even less, *the witness of life* is the first and most important way of communicating. Six interventions, beside the ones quoted above on social communication, stressed in addition this point. Such a witness can be broken down to interpersonal and corporate communication:

- Every Christian must be a communicator, testifying to his faith like the early Christians in the Acts of the Apostles;
- But also the Church as a community must give such witness of life, so that others say like with the early Christians: "see, how they love each other" (cf. Acts 2:43ff;4:32ff). Only grounded on this also the attempts of the Church to relate in a good way to the public, especially the media, through spokespersons, *Public Relations* offices etc. will be in the long run fruitful.

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

Storytelling is genuine part of Asian cultures. Like Jesus Christ used this way of communicating, also Christians in Asia should not overlook this challenge. Storytelling happens, however, not only in personal and community relationships but also in and with modern means of Social Communication.

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

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

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

Radio, is for the Church, a special powerful means to communicate. It is used on the continental level by her own *Radio Veritas Asia* and in quite some countries also through local and national stations and/or programming. Radio can reach people in remote, otherwise not accessible areas and does communicate also with those who are not yet literate.

After the *Asian Christian Television (ACT)* experience in Thailand, the Church should not any more be afraid to go into *Television and Satellite Communication*. There is no need for her to own the technology but she should gain experience and be available for production and cooperation.

In a growing way, life and societies in Asia today are also determined by the *modern means of social communication* like Mass Media, Internet and other new technologies. This modern *market place (Areopagus)* becomes especially for the young very often the main "means of information and education, of guidance and inspiration" (Redemptoris Missio). Therefore the Church must seriously consider how to integrate the Gospel message into such new possibilities and how to train and support Christians working in these communication fields.

Proper *Media Education* should be considered as a must in the formation of young people in families and learning institutions.

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

Already the "Inter Mirifica" document on Social communication of the Second Vatican Council has already declared the *proper training of priests, seminarians, religious and lay people* as urgent. This need is even more urgent today in Asia where societies change not only through economies but also in a powerful way through the media. If the church wants to use the modern means of social communication she needs first and foremost evangelizers who are properly trained and are professionally sound also in communications.

In Asian countries, where the Church is not free like China, the special assistance and solidarity of other Asian Churches is needed. Such a support is expressed in the promotion of *Radio Veritas Asia* and similar initiatives through which people in such countries can be reached by airwaves but also through providing literature and other means of information, of moral and spiritual support.

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

Footnote

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

The Gospel and the Means of Social Communication

21. All the answers to the Lineamenta are in broad agreement that one of the "modern areopagi" 29 requiring urgent evangelization is that of the means of social communication. The fundamental reason for this urgent need is the influence exercised by the media over almost every individual. Reference is quite rightly made to a "mass culture" which affects persons, changing their way of thinking, their values and style of behaviour. In contrast, many answers confirm the scarce presence - in certain cases, the complete absence - of the Church in the field of the means of social communication. A common point of agreement is the need to deal with this question at two levels:

1) the use of the media to transmit the Gospel message and the Magisterium of the Church. At this level, even where the Church in all America is utilizing various means in the media to transmit her news (periodicals, various publications, radio and television broadcasts, computer networks, etc.) there is evidence that the use made of these media is often inadequate for lack of updated equipment, economic resources and sufficiently skilled personnel.

2) The integration of the Gospel message in this "new culture" created by modern communications. The evangelization of present-day culture indeed depends to a large extent on the influence of the media. 30 At this level, there is a need to bring the values of the Gospel to bear on the ethical principles underlying the handling of information, the content of communication transmitted to the masses and the goals of working in the world of communications. Many times, the responses indicate that frequently the goal of the agents of communications is economic gain and not the promotion of the person.