

Communication Challenges in Asia II
Bishops' Meet '97
**A New Way of Being Church in Asia -
Communication Consequences**

*Bangkok, Thailand
November 24-28, 1997*

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Based on the Final Considerations and experiences of the first FABC-OSC Bishops' Meet '96 July 8 to 12, 1996 in Tagaytay City (Philippines), the second assembly of Bishops and Secretaries responsible in Bishops' Conferences for Social Communication discussed in a special way the communication challenges of *A New Way of Being Church in Asia* (5th FABC Plenary, Bandung 1990). The 35 participants from 14 different countries, assembled in Samphran (Thailand) from November 24 to 28, 1997, took up the FABC considerations of the new way of being Church. Such a Church is

- A communion of communities
- A participatory church
- A witnessing and dialoguing church
- A prophetic church

As Communicators being responsible for the Bishops Conferences we ask ourselves:
Where are we going and what are we doing in the spirit of a new way of being Church?

- The FABC Plenary assembly in Bandung described the Church as at its deepest level a communion (koinonia) rooted in the life of the Trinity and thus in its essential reality *a sacrament of the loving self-communication of God*. If we are a **Communion of Communities** our communication must aim at community building. We need to create a new style of leadership which is enabling and facilitating, being real leaders and not mere followers. The voice of the laity must be heard louder and clearer. The marginalized and the poor too have a voice to be recognized in the Church.
- If we are a truly **participatory Church**, "where the gifts that the Spirit gives to all.. are recognized and activated" (FABC, Bandung) there must be communication that encourages co-responsibility at all levels both vertically and horizontally. We have to find and create a 'mechanism' to effectively bring about this communication. Are we really seen as people of God, praying people, Spirit-filled, dynamic, evangelizing and mission-oriented? Do we share God's love and concern with the people we work with?
- If we are a **witnessing and dialoguing Church**, our communication must be concerned with the World, where people live in their joys and hopes, their fears and anxieties reaching "out to people of others faiths and persuasions in a dialogue of life towards the integral liberation of all" (FABC, Bandung). Therefore our communication
 1. Has to reflect the preferential option for the poor and oppressed
 2. Should build on historical moments and events e.g. the death of Mother Teresa, celebrations and anniversaries of communities and people

3. Must make an impact at the right moment: are we involved in e.g. national issues?
4. Has to be dialogical:
- e. *Within the Church* concrete efforts must be made to eliminate communication gaps and to "effectively establish relationships...through communication which is transparent, dialogic, and marked with candor" (BISCOM I, Orientation #4). Equality and co-responsibility as well as interpersonal communication are to be developed.
- f. Communicating with other religions and peoples of good will in mutual trust, openness and transparency the Church needs to look beyond institutional boundaries moving into the unknown led by the Spirit within.

Networking and cooperation with other religions should be promoted. Concrete plans should be worked out in the context of common issues which affect all. This "requires reciprocal trust and understanding among Catholics, other Christians, and members of other religions, based on mutual respect, and with a view of doing things together in Communication" (Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Criteria for Ecumenical and Interreligious Cooperation, 1989, No.19). "Interfaith dialogue leading to understanding and cooperation should be an aspect of all our communication programs and activities. It is imperative to make it clear to our brothers and sisters of other faiths that we are not in anyway aligned with destructive forces in the 'new media culture.' Failure to do so will alienate them further from us" (Bishops' Meet '96). In most countries of Asia, Christianity is a minority where we need to let other religions feel that we respect them and they can trust in us. We celebrate e.g. national and religious festivals, with all. God loves everybody.

- If we are a **prophetic Church** we should be a "leaven of transformation in this world and serve as a prophetic sign to point beyond this world" (FABC, Bandung). Therefore, our church communication must challenge, announce and denounce... In what way are we crying out like the prophets with conviction and in a convincing manner? Where is our witness of life "which communicates first?" (BM'96) Are we seen as standing with people crying out for justice, harmony, equality, ecology? We should not only cry over unsolvable problems of our countries but also highlight the fact that our continent is rich in cultures, traditions, values and religions. Filled with such riches, the Church should think of herself as a giving and not only receiving community. She should perceive this as a new call to integrate Gospel values into the "new culture created by media" (BM'96). It is also time to think about helping each other within the continent of Asia instead of always looking outside for financial help.

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

- The communication challenges of "A New Way of being Church in Asia" should lead us to **concrete steps for action** which means beside others:
 - a. To share the *communication consequences* of being a new church in Asia with our bishops and church leaders, with seminarians under training and their professors, with lay people, especially those involved in the apostolate. This should be part of every pastoral planning (BM'96, No. 1). A visible close cooperation among the Bishops' Conference and dioceses will be a good and tangible example for a communion of communities.

- b. To be aware of the fact that secular media in our countries are not always people-oriented, liberating and contributing to a healthy development. This calls on the Church to make a serious move towards an *alternative, culture-based, indigenous and people-oriented communication*. Interpersonal and Group Media/Communication needs to be given priority, especially in formation and education. Instead of complaining about cultural invasion and mental colonization, the Church must first take initiatives to encourage cultural communication within her own institutions.
- c. To take initiatives in *highlighting success stories* of small people doing extraordinary things within and outside the Church.
- d. To give primary importance to *Media Education* in redefining it as a new form of evangelization for the emerging media situation in our continent. In many places, it still has to be "made mandatory at all levels, especially in seminaries" and the 'training of trainers' must be continued (BM'96, No. 5).
- e. To see the common celebration of *World Communication Day* as an important way to contribute to a new way of being Church in Asia (BM'96, No. 8).
- f. To promote deeper *studies and research* into the communication needs and consequences for a new way of being Church in Asia.
- g. To *share information* about church events and communication developments in the different countries also with modern technical means e.g. E-Mail.
- h. We must "see *Public Relations* as an important concern and act accordingly" (BM'96, No. 4; BISCOP I).
- i. To make useful *productions* promoting "a new way of being Church in Asia" available, including those of secular media and from other Christian bodies (BM'96, No. 3).
- j. To inform about and possibly share *training facilities and personnel* between the different Bishops' Conferences.