

"Synod of Bishops- Special Assembly for Asia: Social Communication Perspectives & Challenges"

FABC-OSC Bishops' Meet '98

Taipei, Taiwan

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FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The "Synod of Bishops-Special Assembly for Asia" from April 19 to May 14, 1998 in Rome was a special hour of grace to the Church in Asia. It made us aware again of special concerns and obligations like inter-religious dialogue, the communion of communities, inculturation, spirituality, a new way of being Church, human promotion...

The Synod Fathers said in their final message that "the Media is rightly called modern *Aeropagus*, 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."

This reflects the concern of Pope John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio*, where he writes: "Involvement in the mass media, however, is not meant merely to strengthen the preaching of the Gospel. There is a deeper reality involved here: since the very evangelization of modern culture depends to a great extent on the influence of the media, it is not enough to use 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 communications" (RM, 37c).

It is in the spirit and based on the Final Considerations of the "FABC-OSC Bishop's Meet" 1996 that we, the participants, make the following recommendations:

1. Spirituality of Communication

With the many challenges being faced today, we felt that the spirituality of those involved in social communication must be re-emphasized. Such a spirituality "flows out of the communication of the Holy Trinity" (Bishops' Meet'96).

Jesus Christ as the perfect communicator' (*Communio et Progressio*, 11) is the model of all Christian communication.

"Christian communicators need to be men and women of spirit-filled prayer, entering ever more deeply into communion with God in order to grow in their ability to foster communion among their fellow human beings. They must be schooled in hope by the holy spirit, the principal agent of the new evangelization (*Tertio Millenio Adveniente*, 45)..." (John Paul II, World Communication Day '98)

Any spirituality of communication is first and foremost expressed through the witness of life (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41) which means for the communicator in Asia:

- to be a person of contemplation and prayer, similar to the missionary whom Pope John Paul II describes as a "contemplative in action"(cf. RM, 91);

- the ability to build communities through love, sharing, communion, relationship and equality;
- the content of one's communication should reflect one's spirituality rooted in the Incarnation-communicators need to be people oriented;
- the proclamation of Kingdom values amidst a society of violence, corruption and evil forces.

2. Spiritual Formation

In their enthusiasm to be professional in their work, it has been observed that the sense of spirituality has declined among Church communicators. Hence, well defined areas of formation are recommended for:

- Catholic communicators working in Church media;
- Catholic communicators in secular media;
- media professionals in general.

3. Dialogue with Cultures and Religions

In realizing the "New Way of Being Church in Asia" (cf. Bishops' Meet '97), which was emphasized again at the Asian Synod ("...that they may have Life and have it abundantly" Jn.10:10), greater collaboration and assistance has to be initiated among all Christians, and with peoples of other religions and cultures. We recommend the implementation of suitable programs on Media Education, traditional and indigenous media in order to help people to be more responsible, that is, to be appreciative, critical and discriminating users of the means of social communication within their own culture.

4. Public Relations Officer

In the context of the current "mediated" society, we recommend that every Bishops' Conference and diocese appoint as part of a "Pastoral Plan" a Public Relations Officer, in fulfillment of the provisions of the Pastoral Instructions *Communio et Progressio* (1971, Nos.174-176) and *Aetatis Novae* (1992, No.31) (cf.also Bishops' Institute for Social Communication, BISCOS I on 'Church and Public Relations,'Singapore 1997, "Orientations and Recommendations").

The officer's key role is to make the presence of the Church felt more in society. "All these officials, and indeed all those who are identified with the Church in the mind of the public, should... consider the sort of audience they are, at various times, addressing and establishing a relationship that is based on mutual trust and understanding. This can only be maintained as long as people have a genuine regard and consideration for one another and a scrupulous respect for truth..."(CP,174)

5. Pastoral Care for Catholics in Secular Media

In the pastoral care for Catholics in secular media, we recommend that:

- frequent contacts with them should be initiated by the respective social communications office of the diocese;

- bishops should meet Catholic but also Christian and non-Christian professionals as frequent as possible;
- formation programs for them should include Media Ethics and pastoral priorities of the local Church;
- they be given a prominent role in the celebration of World Communication Day.

6. Concern for professionals in Communication

Pastors should accept and recognize professionals in communication and develop and promote dialogue and collaboration with them. (cf. CP, 175; BISCOP I, "Orientations and Recommendations")