

Bishops' Meet '99
**"Megatrends Asia:
Communication Trends for the Church"**

*Bangkok, Thailand
22-27 November, 1999*

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Preamble

As Asia enters the third millennium, ethnic, linguistic, economic and cultural diversities seem to emerge sharper and affect the life and mentality of a growing and teeming population. The Asian continent benefits from the advancements in science and technology, and becomes a major player in the world of trade and commerce. Media are a chief element in this development.

There are emerging trends which cannot be ignored.* They are, to different degrees, influencing the actual situation and future of the Asian continent. These "megatrends" challenge Church leaders and Christian communicators in a special way.

1. From Nations to Networks

Today, there are no longer individual countries battling with each other for political or economic supremacy. Many have aligned with each other for reasons often more economic than political. Networks are emerging based more on ethnic affiliations and/or common economic interests.

Challenges

1. Because of the importance of the public image of the Church, in a mainly non-Christian environment, it is necessary to develop Communication/Public Relations offices on national and diocesan levels with information systems like faxes, e-mail, internet, intranet, websites, etc so that information can be easily accessed and networking be done. [cf. BISCOP I (1997); BISCOP I.1 (1999); Bishops' Meet '98, 4] **
2. Collaborative efforts should be made on parish, diocesan, regional and national levels for periodicals and other Church productions for Christians from different cultures and nations to get to know each other better and join forces.
3. Beyond our own chapels and Churches, we can provide in our Catholic institutions prayer rooms where people of all religious denominations can "feel at home."
4. Christian communication must help to make people aware of various trade agreements (like NAFTA, APEC, etc) to help them safeguard their rights and prevent exploitation.

2. From Export to Consumer "cultures"

There was a time when Asia produced mainly low cost consumer products for export. Now, Japan and the other Asian economic "tigers" have ventured into telecommunications, computers and other modern industries. This leads to greater economic prosperity but also to emerging strong consumer "cultures." (cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 77, 39)

Challenges

1. Consumerist and western influences tend to develop cultures without God and deeper values. Christian communication must help to keep God and bring Him back into the center of human life, which corresponds very much with Asian values. (cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 29)
2. Christian Media Education should help people to identify their real needs and not to be carried away by manipulations. These programs must be integrated into every Church ministry. (cf. Bishops' Meet '96; Bishops' Meet '97, 5d)
3. Against the dominance of a "consumer culture," Christian communicators should help to build alternative cultures based on a deep and communicating spirituality.
4. Issues of justice, peace and social equality are essential contents of any Christian communication.
5. Consumers should be made aware of real facts behind advertisements and marketing strategies. Good advertising, on the other hand, can help promote Asian and Christian values. (cf. Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Ethics in Advertising*, 1997)

3. From Western to the Asian Way

In Asia, we become more and more conscious of traditions and values in our own cultures as well of our political, economic and socio-cultural identities. The "Asian Way" grows more and more popular also in other continents and countries of the world.

Challenges

1. The FABC triple dialogue with the poor, religions and various Asian cultures needs to be further developed and supported through corresponding communication programs. (cf. Bishops' Meet '97, 3)
2. We are still seen as very western in our religious practices. Christian communication should help towards a more inculturated Church in using more Asian symbols and communicative expressions. Within the Church, liturgical celebrations especially homilies should be communicative and respond to the real needs and feelings of people. (cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 22)
3. Christianity very often is seen as a religion of social action, education and governance. The effect of prayer and spirituality, however, should be reflected in our communications because a Christian communicator is a "contemplative in action." (cf. Bishops' Meet '98, 1)

Our prayer and spirituality are finally people-centered because we communicate the full truth about the human person, whose dignity is based on "being an image and likeness of

God" empowered by the Spirit of Jesus in the fullness of the Father's love. (FABC Consultation on Evangelization and Communication, 1999, Orientations and Recommendations, I.2)

4. The growing gap between different ages and cultural groups needs to be bridged through proper dialogue and communication.

5. Not everything traditional is automatically good. Cultures influence each other. Christian communication must help to discern the real values, priorities and needs of communities and individuals leading to a responsible approach.

4. From Government-controlled to Market-driven

While the role of governments is being limited to supporting laws and auditing, the management of enterprises and public utilities is handed over to the private sector. The growing privatization also of media enterprises creates additional communication possibilities as well as responsibilities.

Challenges

1. In an more and more market-oriented environment, Christian communication should continue to highlight the plight of the poor, the marginalized, minorities, indigenous cultures, migrant workers, etc. They should treasure the values of dying cultures and help them survive.

2. Christian media need to be the "voice of the voiceless." Since privatized communication enterprises very often ignore the marginalized, we should have the courage to highlight their situations and needs. (cf. Bishops' Meet '97, 1)

3. Education for environment and issues of ecology need to be addressed by Christian communication.

4. Christian communicators should contribute to the protection of cultural and religious sites, and keep them from exaggerated commercialized tourism.

5. From Villages to Supercities

Cities are becoming bigger due to migration from the countryside. A majority of the "supercities" of the world in the 21st century will be in Asia.

Challenges

1. Urban ministries need a special communication approach. Christian communication should help people to grow from anonymity to community.

2. Village people should be made aware that they are not powerless. Grassroot communication projects help to develop such an awareness and should contribute to a positive acceptance of rural values.

3. "Media cells" in every parish can help develop an approach which serves in a special way local needs.

6. From Labour-intensive to High-technology

Advancements in science and technology have also pushed Asia to pioneer a revolution in high technology. A "reverse brain-drain" is starting to take place.

Challenges

1. Christian communication should help to promote high-tech education to contribute to the development of our countries.
2. Young people, especially in cities, grow up with the latest communication equipment. Church leaders should be aware of the importance and possibilities of modern communication technologies for their communities, especially their young members, and take up these challenges. (cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 37c)

7. From Rich to Poor

In spite of seeming prosperity and development, a growing economic imbalance in several Asian countries and the distance between the rich and the poor cannot be denied.

Challenges

1. Church communicators should help to make the poor aware of their situation and promote programs designed for their development. (cf. Paulo Freire: "conscientization")
2. They should challenge the rich and make multinationals aware of their responsibility to the human family so that the world's resources are shared among all.
3. Church communicators should help see the effects of globalization, both positive and negative. Globalization should not damage people and nations in their dignity but contribute to their development.

8. From Traditions to Options

In the past, young people grew up in societies based on stable, cultural, moral and spiritual traditions. Now, these traditions are very often substituted through different options available to the individual and community. (cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 7, 39)

Challenges

1. Christian communication should show the value of traditions but at the same time also help to discern new developments.

2. Especially young people need guidance in a more and more diversified society. Christian communicators should be their companions and guides, and not interested only in material or financial gain from their operations. (cf. Bishops' Meet '97, 4)

3. In the modern communication situation, where the news is available to everybody at an instance, journalists and Church leaders are not anymore just "gatekeepers" who determine what reaches the audience. They must be "guides" through the jungle of options, inspired by the principles and visions of Christian faith.

9. Emergence of Women

More and more women are holding positions of importance which were traditionally held by men. Education of women at various levels helped towards such a development.

Challenges

1. The situation of women, especially where they are degraded e.g. through infanticide, dowry deaths, sex-trade, etc should be addressed in an efficient way by Christian communicators.

2. In Church media centers, women should be promoted as directors, teachers, and not merely as secretaries and helpers.

3. Christian communicators should create programs, where dialogue between traditional and new emerging groups of women can be facilitated.

10. From Belief to Fundamentalism

The emergence of fundamentalism and secularism has given rise to insecurity and confrontational situations among various groups of nations and communities.

Challenges

1. The Church and her leaders should avoid everything which leads people to being fanatic. Christian communication must foster cooperation as well as unity, and balance the extremes emerging in communities and societies. (cf. Bishops' Meet '97)

2. Christian communication should highlight similarities and values common to all Asian religions and help people to respect each other, especially in their religious convictions. (cf. Bishops' Meet '97; '98)

* cf. *John Naisbitt: "Megatrends Asia"*. New York (Simon & Schuster), 1997; Asiaweek, Special Edition: "Asian in the New Millennium." (volume 25 number 23) August 20-27, 1999.

** For FABC-OSC documents quoted, refer to "**FABC Paper No. 85**" August, 1999; Revised and Enlarged Edition October, 1999.

