

CONSULTATION ON “EVANGELIZATION AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATION”

For the first time, two Offices of the FABC organized a joint program. As announced, the FABC Office of Evangelization held a Consultation on “Evangelization and Social Communication” in collaboration with the FABC Office of Social Communication at Santhome Communications Centre, Chennai from 4-8 July with participation of 20 persons specialized in Missiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Theology and Social Communication.

All appreciated the coming together of the two FABC Offices and the interdisciplinary cross-fertilization that took place and the new perspectives opened up by the joint venture for the two groups. The presentation of the papers gave each of the participants an opportunity to study seriously one’s own subject in the context of the other discipline. They expressed their happiness for constituting a permanent “think tank” for the two Offices. They strongly recommended that the papers produced by the participants be published in a book form after being reviewed by their Authors in the light of the discussions and observations made during the Consultation, together with the “Orientations and Recommendations” of the Consultation.

In this first stage, the experts in the field reviewed past achievements and shortcomings with a real “feeling with the Church”, clarified the concepts and deepened their understanding of the mission, and proposed fresh orientations and recommendations for an effective evangelization. They committed themselves to be available to the two Offices of the FABC and FABC as such as resource persons and as its “think-tank” cell. They committed themselves also to be available to conduct Consultations/Seminars on the basis of the findings of this Consultation, for the FABC member Conferences individually or for the Conferences of a Region, if their services are sought at the time of annual/biennial meetings of the Conferences. At the end of their deliberations they issued what they called “Orientations and Recommendations”.

Orientations and Recommendations of the Consultation

We, the Church persons involved in Evangelization and Social Communication, met at Chennai, India on July 4-8, 1999 to discern and seek ways by which Social Communication can help the Evangelization process in Asia. We recognize the significance of this event - *kairos* - where the Spirit has led us to value deeply the inherent link between Social Communication and the task of Evangelization.

From our joint responsibility of evangelizing and communicating Christ we share the following orientations and recommendations:

I – ORIENTATIONS

We see the Church as a communion of ecclesial communities participating in the mission and ministry of Jesus. (Cf. FABC: “A New Way of Being Church in Asia.”)

1. In proclaiming Jesus to the peoples of Asia, we communicate “the full truth about the human person”. The human person whose dignity is based on “being an image and likeness of God” (Cf. *Redemptoris Missio* # 58, 60; *Evangelii Nuntiandi* # 33, 78), and being empowered by the Spirit of Jesus for the fullness of the Father’s love.

2. The human person is the basis of our dialogue with all people of good will, all religions and cultures and especially with the poor and young people of Asia. We are committed to bring Jesus' message to all nations of Asia. Our contribution lies in the witnessing to our faith and facilitating a dialogue of Faith and Life, Gospel and Culture, Church and Society.
3. The Church as a communion-in-mission has to begin by evangelizing herself by the life and ministry of Jesus. She has to be transformed by "the full truth about the human person." Evangelization calls for such renewal (*mission ad intra*) since the Church is a pilgrim among the Asian peoples.
4. Social Communication is intimately linked with the mission of the Church within herself (*ad intra*) and to the outside world (*ad extra*).
5. The proclamation of the Good News in Asia is based on the "triple dialogue" (FABC) with the poor, cultures and religions. This involves also all areas of human behavior, thought patterns, social and cultural dynamics, environment and modern technology.

II – RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Sensitivity to Asian Cultures and Religions

Given the multi-religious and multi-cultural situation in Asia, we need to engage in a genuine dialogue with all people in Asia. This is possible only if prejudices are overcome and we share, in a spirit of pilgrimage, in the joys and aspirations, fears and anxieties of people.

- Inter-religious dialogue is not possible without sufficient knowledge of other religions. Therefore, we should begin to teach and instill appreciation for other religions even in our catechism classes.
- To cultivate Asian consciousness, our media centers should make sure that at least a few of their products are produced every year with an all-Asia perspective. These (training manuals, videos etc.) should be made in English and in such a way that they could be used in all Asian countries.
- To ensure justice for women we should use inclusive language.

2. Approach towards Secular Communications

- We should accept and appreciate at all levels the role of Social Communication in Asian societies.
- Even if sometimes media tend to sensationalize negative aspects, we should recognize their prophetic role.
- We "should accept and recognize professionals in communication and develop and promote dialogue and collaborate with them" (FABC-OSC Bishops Meet '98 #6,6).
- The Church's participation in the secular media includes submitting articles for publication and providing programs for broadcast, being available for interviews and offering timely and accurate information when required.
- As "communion of communities", we should actively oppose negative portrayal of and public attacks on Catholic and other religious groups.

3. Social Communication for Evangelization

To ensure effectiveness in Evangelization in Asia:

- We should have our "success stories" publicized to inspire others to a life of faith.

- We should use movies, TV shows, songs and other media in religion courses, formation seminars and homilies.
- With the help of social communications, Church leaders should ensure that Christian communities are mission-oriented and avoid privatization of faith.
- We should provide a communication environment attractive to young people such as media events, performances, special liturgies, pilgrimages, camps etc.
- We should join with other religious groups, NGO's and professionals in conducting media campaigns, which address national and social needs.
- Our media centers should produce programs aimed at perceived needs of the audience, with a sub-text of human values.

4. Evangelizing Communication within the Church

- Church documents should be user-friendly and written in a language that can be understood by today's media-saturated society. To achieve this, the Church should involve journalists in formulating these documents.
- To guarantee effective communication professionals must be employed and retained in our institutions with competitive salaries.
- A team of crisis management experts should be available to assist Church leaders when needed.
- Church communication centers should network among themselves and other people and NGO's to inspire and assist each other. We should make our facilities available to media people committed to human values.
- We should help Bishops, priests, religious and seminarians to acquire a thorough understanding of the workings of Social Communication on different levels, from homiletics to the use of modern technologies for evangelization. This requires regular training courses in formation programs.

5. Conclusion

- We, the participants of the FABC Consultation on Evangelization and Social Communication in Asia, are ready to help the Church in Asia to implement these recommendations. We are available to serve the national Bishops' Conferences, especially at their regular meetings.
- We thank the FABC Offices of Evangelization and Social Communication for their joint initiative to bring us together.

For further information see:

Mario Saturnino Dias (Editor);

Evangelization and Social Communication,

Mumbai (St Pauls). 2000 pp 296