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SOCIAL COMMUNICATION IN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS OF ASIA

“Social Communications in Religious Traditions of Asia” was the theme of a Roundtable organized by the FABC Office of Social Communication in cooperation with the Graduate School of Philosophy and Religion of Assumption University and the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication of Saint John’s University in Bangkok.

The meeting took place October 3-7 at Assumption University Huamark campus and was locally organized by the faculty there. Some 20 scholars and specialists from different religions presented their findings on the role of social communication in Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Confucianism.

Social Communication was stated as being at the beginning of all religions, and also decisive for the spreading of religious meanings and practices. In some religions like Hinduism, a certain “incommunicability” exists as the inner core of religious communications which cannot be fully expressed in verbal ways. This is also true in Christian communication with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the communicator.

Religious communication, the participants agreed, is very much related to oral traditions, and the use of symbols as means of communication. Languages are also an important vehicle.

Communication in religions calls for a certain equality between communicator and recipient. Religious communication is not only top-bottom, and merely concerned about dissemination of information. Rather, it is supposed to foster participation and sharing.

Such communication is based on a deep spirituality growing from silence as a special source of inspiration and experiencing the Holy. Religious communication has also a liberative function in the lives and experiences of people.

Communication in the religious traditions of Asia does not rely on technical means alone but is determined by reflection and action, the participants said. They acknowledged, however, the growing challenge of multimedia and the Internet of modern times.

Here is the full text of the --

FINAL STATEMENT

INTRODUCTION

Studying the different religious traditions of Asia, we the 20 participants of a roundtable of invited scholars at the Graduate School of Philosophy and Religion of Assumption University of Bangkok realized that:

Social communication has been part of all religions right from their beginning and throughout their history. In all religious traditions, communication stands at the beginning of religious experience as in Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism and Christianity.

‘Social communication’ is understood as communication of and in human society. It comprises not only the mass media but all means of human communicating as far as they relate to human society.

WAYS AND MEANS

The following considerations are derived and applicable to all major religions in Asia:

1) The ways and means of social communication in different religious traditions are reflected, beside others, in:

- Oral traditions like story-telling, teaching and preaching
- Use or application of symbols, icons as well as artistic expressions
- Traditional means like art, music, dance, drama and theater.
- Languages are important vehicles for conveying the religious message to the people.

2) Communication in Religion ideally requires equality between communicators and audiences. It is not concerned about “selling” but rather about sharing and appreciation of experiences and convictions. Communication in Religions is not concerned merely with dissemination of information and news but rather with participation and sharing.

3) Communication in Religion is based on spirituality, growing from silence as a special source of inspiration and experiencing the holy. Communication in Religions has a liberative function in the daily lives and experiences of peoples.

- 4) Communication in Religion does not rely on technical means only but is also determined by reflection and action. It should see special opportunities in modern information and communication technologies (ICTs).
- 5) Communication in Religion normally operates on two levels: the internal, for communication within the religious community; and the external, for communication with other religions and the outside world.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of our discussions, we came to the following recommendations:

- 1) Religious leaders, social activists, artists and scholars as well as communicators from different religions of Asia must engage in inclusive and sustained dialogues leading toward deeper Interreligious understanding. Elaborating the richness of religious experience, and underlining common-ness rather than differences will contribute to deeper and more sincere dialogues.
- 2) People's awareness of the benefits and pitfalls of the "new culture" of communication – marked by "new techniques, new languages and new psychology" (cf. Redemptoris Missio, 37c) must increase. Efforts in scientific research as well as communication education and communication ethics should be pursued at all levels with the help of academic institutions and religious formation centers in Asia.
- 3) Government and non-government organizations in Asia must contribute to and facilitate growing efforts for peace both within and among Asian religions. The high values of social communication e.g. fairness, accuracy, impartiality, and others must be upheld to enhance harmony, tolerance, and wholesome understanding between religions.
- 4) This Roundtable proposes to request the UN Secretary General to initiate the setting up of an "Interreligious Council" within the UN system that will promote harmony among religions. National counterparts of this council could also be set up throughout Asia to help initiate Interreligious dialogue in their countries.
- 5) Those responsible for social communications in the different religions are especially reminded of their responsibility to foster Interreligious understanding and dialogue. Media professionals must be properly trained in effective reporting of religious news and events. The role of media in peace-building is a special concern.

NEWS

INDIA: CHURCH LEADERS IN ORISSA PLAN TO USE MEDIA TO PROJECT POSITIVE IMAGE

A regional consultation of some 50 Church leaders in Orissa August 28-30 have decided to train laypeople in media, launch websites and start a local language newspaper to improve the Church's image in the eastern Indian state. The bishops and heads of religious congregations present also resolved to encourage young Catholics to work in mainstream media. Divine Word Bishop Lucas Kerketta of Sambalpur says local secular media often project a "negative image" of the Church and that the Church "for a long time, wanted to combat this harmful tendency." Bishop Kerketta's diocese is one of five in Orissa, and he heads the regional social communication commission. (UCAN)

KOREA: DIOCESE LAUNCHES INTERNET TV BROADCASTS

The Diocese of Uijeongbu opened new horizons for cyber-mission by launching on-line TV broadcasts on June 24, 2005. With mottos "Beautiful Eyes Looking at the World" and "A Path Opened to the Beautiful World," the Catholic on-line TV service called UTV provides news, education, social welfare and cultural programs. The service also offers formation programs for lay people via the "Catholic UTV Academy." Fr John hoi Sung-woo, director of Uijeongbu's public relations and IT departments, says UTV is both interactive and accessible. It has the "warmth of the heart of Jesus Christ, spreading the story of the poor and the weak and comforting the broken hearted," he added. (CBCK NEWS)

PHILIPPINES: 25 YEARS OF CLARETIAN PUBLISHING

The Claretian Publishing House launched a year-long silver jubilee celebration with Holy Eucharist at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish Church in Quezon City north of Manila October 24. The celebration coincides with the feast of St Mary Anthony Claret, founder of the Claretian society of missionaries, and the 38th foundation of the order's Claret School. Manila Archbishop Gaudencio Rosales was main celebrant of the Mass. He reminded some 300 students, faculty, priests and guests to live the example of Claret, preaching to and living with the poor. (OSC)

PHILIPPINES: SOCIAL COMMUNICATION WORKERS EDUCATE FILIPINOS ON BENEFITS AND DANGERS OF MEDIA

Church workers in the social communication ministry are conducting media education courses in schools, parishes and religious communities. On September 17, some 100 lay workers from parishes in and around Manila gathered in a media forum at San Carlos Seminary, Makati near Manila. Divine Word Father Lino Nicasio, svd spoke at the occasion urging parents to help children decode media messages and distinguish between reality and fiction. Media are "neutral," the former SVD communications coordinator said, and as such can be used either for "evil" or "good" purposes. At the Ateneo Grade School Educational Media Center northeast of Manila, Delia Hernandez, president of the Philippine Association for Media Education (PAME), helps her co-teachers develop media reading skills to improve their teaching. In August, Paulines Media Center Director, Sr Consolata Manding, conducted a media education seminar for teachers and staff of parish schools in and around Manila. The sister reminded the participants of the need to evaluate and regulate media "based on moral and Gospel values." (UCAN)

INDIA: CITY JESUITS IN MUMBAI SEEK NEW IMAGE

The Jesuits, who run some big-ticket educational institutions in Mumbai city, have decided that they need some branding. Jesuit provincial Fr Francis de Melo said the aim of branding is to help people forge that vital connection between the Jesuits and their numerous institutions. He said branding can help build an awareness of the various works the Jesuits are engaged in apart from running prestigious institutions. "We run not only a world-class college but also schools in rural areas for tribal children," he added. "The Jesuit name will be the mother brand, and schools like St Xavier's at Dhobi Talao and St Stanislaus in Bandra will be sub-brands," explains a brand consultant summoned for a first workshop with members of the religious order. Church circles say that the Jesuits, or Society of Jesus, have been spurred into action in the wake of globalization which has brought in a rush of expensive, high-profile institutions offering international degrees. (TIMES OF INDIA)

