

FABC-OSC
Roundtable on
**Religion and Social Communication:
Relations and Challenges**
Saint John's University, Bangkok
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RATIONALE

The communication of and in human society is the field of social communication. Communication in human society though is not only a matter of information technology, of business and even cultural relations. It involves, in a special way, religion and religious practices.

No human society can exist without a certain level of religious beliefs and practices. Even philosophers, like Jurgen Habermas who originally neglected the existence and role of religion in society, came to the insight that without religion human society cannot exist, even in a post-modern age.

The role and importance of religion in Asian cultures has never been questioned. Religion, however, is practised within society and therefore has also a communicative dimension; hence, the challenge to study and reflect the means and ways of communicating in and with religious communities.

The question that needs to be asked is: if and how religious practices are influenced and possibly moulded by communication, especially, in the wake of burgeoning modern communication ways and means.

The study of religion and social communication can, thus, be oriented towards:

- a. The communication flow and practice within a religion. This includes rituals, religious services but also communication between persons, person to God (or Deity) communication and vice versa.
- b. It also asks: How modern means of social communication are used and practised within a religion?

c. Can religious practices change, transform or even develop through communication and greater use of communication means? Did religious practices change or develop through Internet, radio and TV programs, etc? Did peoples' attitudes/perceptions toward religion and/or religious practices change through modern means of communication?

Did religious practices change to adjust through common views peoples see or hear on TV and the Internet? How does the modern mindset of people change their disposition towards religion, religious beliefs and commitment?

d. The Internet today is no longer a simple communication means but a culture in itself. How is religion reflected in such a culture? Conversely, does religion influence this "new culture" and the communication of and in this culture?

Already in 1990, Pope John Paul II wrote about the "new culture" created by modern means of communication. This culture is characterized by new ways of communicating, new languages, a new psychology and new techniques. How do religions respond to this situation which affects their internal communication as well as their communication to the outside?

The Roundtable on Religion and Social Communication aims to take up some of these questions in order to:

1. Build awareness about communication developments in their relation to religion and religious practices, and provide a vision for future research and study.
2. Identify possible concrete projects and proposals which the Asian Research for Religion and Social Communication (ARC) should develop in a more systematic way based on an inclusive view which considers all Asian religions and goes beyond Christianity.
3. Come up with a strategic plan for the future, which should contribute to a deeper understanding of the issues.
4. Animate, support and accompany research on religion and social communication.
5. Develop links with scholars and centers with similar concerns, academic and beyond.
6. Seek financial support for research initiatives in order to build up the ARC and its bi-annual research journal.

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