

CBCI GENERAL BODY MEETING 2004

Jan. 07-14, 2004, Marymatha Major Seminary, Thrissur

FINAL STATEMENT



CALLED TO BE A COMMUNICATING CHURCH

We 156 members of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India met at Marymatha Major Seminary, Thrissur, Kerala, from Jan 07 -14, 2004 to reflect on the topic: The Church and Social Communications.

1. India we realize is making great strides in the field of Information Technology. The press, radio, cinema, television and other Information Technologies have expanded tremendously in the last few years. These have enabled people to relate and communicate to each other even when separated by long distances, thus building a world-wide web. The media are exercising a great influence on the minds of the people and creating public opinion.

2. We are happy to note that the mainstream mass media in India, by and large, have contributed greatly to uphold democratic and secular values. In the face, at times, of intense pressure from opposing forces, they have striven to safeguard the rights of citizens, particularly of the weaker sections and the minorities. We express our gratitude to the media for contributing substantially to liberate our society from the dark forces of caste & communal hatred, corruption and crime. We salute those who have stood firm in a world of market forces, refusing to surrender to sensationalism, trivialization or to the fanning of social hatred. They have demonstrated that media have a prophetic role, indeed a vocation: to “speak out against the false gods and ideals of the day – materialism, hedonism, consumerism and narrow nationalism” (Ethics in Communications, n.31).

3. While the media bring information, education, entertainment and create public opinion, they also have some negative influences. Some of the values propagated by the

media are contrary to the Gospel and to our culture. An increase in violence can sometimes be traced to the influence of media. Family life, in particular, has been profoundly affected with the promotion of consumerism and values opposed to the sacredness of marriage being beamed into the home.

4. Media, we recognize, are ‘gifts of God’ to humanity. They are in “accordance with his design to unite people in fellowship” and help them “to cooperate with his plan for their salvation” and work for the “unity and advancement of all peoples” (*Communio et Progressio*, n. 2). The signs of the times would demand that we all be media conscious. While encouraging people to be media users, the Church must dutifully alert our people to the threats being posed by the present mass-media and educate them, particularly children and youth, to use the media for authentic and wholesome lives in accordance with the plan of God. We need to motivate all our Church personnel to actively participate in the new opportunities created by media and the information technology to share the Good News and spread the Kingdom of God by fighting the menace of crime, corruption and communalism.

I. Called to Communicate

5. The Triune God is a God of communication. Our faith teaches us that God is not a solitary individual in lonely isolation. Rather, He is a trinity of persons in deep interpersonal communion. Creation is one form of his communication outside of Himself. Further, He communicates Himself to humanity to build a community of love amongst all peoples. He spoke through the prophets and others in preparation for the full communication in His Son, Jesus Christ. “In ancient times God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son.” (Heb. 1:1-2a).

6. Jesus Christ came to communicate the fullness of life so that all could have “life, and have it in abundance” (Jn. 10:10). He was in constant communication with people. His success in communication depended on his personal witness. While proclaiming his message of love he, the ever-compassionate Saviour, adapted it to suit the people, particularly the poor and the marginalized.

7. The disciples of Jesus are commissioned to ‘go and proclaim the good news to all nations’ (Mt 28:19). This commission implies communicating the whole person of Jesus, His word, His life, His message of Redemption. The most important and most effective means of communication is the WITNESS of personal holiness and an authentic life of discipleship. Taking into account our socio-political-economic-religious context, it also implies proclaiming Kingdom values in an inculturated manner for the transformation of the world.

II. A Pastoral Plan for Communications

8. Social Communications have a significant role to play in every aspect of the Church’s mission, and hence they must be integrated into every Church ministry. A

Pastoral Plan for Social Communications should become an integral part of the mission of the Church. We request that the CBCI Commission for Social Communications to draw up a Pastoral Plan, which would include a vision and strategies to stimulate, inspire and promote Catholic activities in this field. Thereby, the whole apostolate of the media will be 'placed under a single, overall direction' (Communio et Progressio, n. 169).

9. It is recommended that as a first step an evaluation be made of existing Communication Centres and their activities. We need to rejuvenate our diocesan Commissions and Communications Centres so that they become truly institutions which communicate and network with local Christian media professionals and other like-minded persons, providing them with pastoral assistance.

10. As soon as possible every region/diocese should setup an Office for Social Communications, and prepare a Pastoral Plan for Communications. Every region/diocese in the country should appoint a director for Communications and a team of capable and qualified persons. With this in view, appropriate personnel – priests, religious and laypeople - should be identified and appointed. The team would do well to enlist the services of experts in the field of communications and other relevant areas. This will help to reach a wider public beyond ecclesiastical circles.

11. The mainstream media, both national and regional, play a vital role in informing the public and creating a public opinion. While upholding the legitimate rights of the media, the Church needs to network with the mainstream media to highlight people's concerns and the Church's point of view. It is necessary to cultivate good relations with media personal. From time to time they can be invited for a friendly dialogue and fellowship. Realising that the regional media in particular have at times not been too favourable to the Church, we must give greater attention to the regional media, both print and electronic. We need to identify and train people for this work.

12. Every diocese should have a talented and trained spokesperson who can establish links at different levels – deanery/ diocesan/ regional/ national.

13. A special area of concern for us is the influence of media on the family. Relevant programmes should be evolved to make the children, youth and parents appreciative, critical and discerning consumers of media.

14. While we deeply appreciate the work done by the Catholic media in spite of scant resources and many odds, we realize the need of improving our periodicals, publications and media productions by bringing in more professionalism in order to make them truly communicative.

15. A large section of the society is illiterate and is not reached by modern media. Care is to taken not to neglect these sections, the least and the last, of society. Hence, the importance of developing systematically, seriously and purposefully alternate media such as folk arts, dance, drama, music, *keertan*, *katha*, street-plays, Christmas cribs, Passion scenes etc.

16. Recognizing that ‘Communications Day’ is a valuable opportunity to sensitize the community, the Sunday before the feast of Christ the King should be celebrated as ‘India Communications Day’ with a meaningful liturgy and relevant programmes. The Holy Father’s message for the day could be disseminated to the grassroots even beyond the Church through the secular media.

III. Communications Training

17. If a pastoral plan is to be successfully implemented, a proper formation programme should be arranged for all in the Church. All leaders of the community - bishops, priests, religious and lay leaders - should get adequate training in communications so that they can effectively discharge their duties for evangelization and defense of the genuine interests of the Church and society.

18. Seminary formators, future diocesan and religious priests should be adequately formed to proclaim the Word effectively and celebrate the Sacred Mysteries meaningfully. Efforts must be made to improve their communication skills. A proper media course should be part of the seminary curriculum. We urge that communications be integrated into all formation – biblical, catechetical and other.

19. Our dedicated catechists, teachers, leaders in our parishes and religious institutions, social workers, and health personnel are living-agents of communication to the public. So also, we are aware how important is the role of those in offices and government duties, especially those in politics - the Lord has placed on them a great responsibility, indeed! We encourage all these to get adequate training to communicate the Gospel more effectively. With a view to the future, we must identify and encourage creative young talented persons to pursue a profession in the media.

IV. Conclusion

20. We are grateful to God the “giver of all good gifts” for the wonderful gifts of communications and for the creativity to use them imaginatively in His service and in the service of our country. We pray for his continued guidance to all media persons and communicators so that they are able to foster a new culture of communications, leading to a human family of peace and harmony.

14.01.04
Thrissur
