

Interreligious Dialogue as Communication

Final Statement of the Fifth Bishops' Institute for Social Communication (BISCOM V) Congress in Bali, Indonesia, from November 22 to 27, 2004

Orientations and Recommendations

We, the 70 participants of BISCOM V from 21 countries comprising of bishops, theologians, media experts and communication animators involved in „Interreligious Dialogue as Communication“ met in Bali, Indonesia, from November 22 to 27, 2004, to study and discuss the social communication dimension of Interreligious dialogue. We exchanged experiences of Interreligious dialogue in our different countries of Asia. We listened to facts about the communications explosion and the immense possibilities it offers but also its risks. We then strengthened our resolve to create a „culture of dialogue“ by working for freedom, justice and peace in our societies through our work in communication.

Our model always is Jesus Christ, the „Perfect Communicator“ (*Communio et Progressio*, 11), who also remains our model for dialogue at all levels. Conscious and aware that God is Father of all and we are all brothers and sisters, and that „Communication is the heart of the Church“, we see Communication as essential for developing an effective Interreligious dialogue in all levels of the Church. Interreligious dialogue for us is an expression of communicating faith.

The Second Vatican Council's „Nostra Aetate“ offers us the theological foundation for our work in nurturing Interreligious Dialogue: „One is the community of all peoples, one their origin, for God made the whole human race to live over the face of the earth. One also is their final goal, God. His providence, His manifestations of goodness, His saving design extend to all men, until that time when the elect will be united in the Holy City, the city ablaze with the glory of God, where the nations will walk in His light.“ (1)

The many conflicts and tensions in Asia make it even more urgent that we further advance our understanding of Communication in the dissemination of values, and Interreligious dialogue to foster peace and harmony.

Orientations

1. Asia is the birth place of many world religions, and its people have a relentless quest for God. This fact is a common starting point for Communication and Interreligious dialogue. Proper communication in Interreligious dialogue is mutually enriching and offers an opportunity to enrich the participants' faith and spirituality.
2. Deeply rooted in our Christian faith and conscious of our call to live out its values of love of God and neighbour, we engage in a spiritual encounter with people of other religions first of all by having an attitude of openness and respect for the believers of other faiths. It is also necessary to increase our knowledge of other faiths, and become more sensitive to the religious experiences of people.
3. Aware also that the cultural and religious contexts in Asia and in the world are continuously changing, we must keep up our commitment for constant Interreligious dialogue. Interreligious dialogue should become a way of life, and is no longer an option but a necessity for all in the Church.
4. We are called to promote the Kingdom of God and to make it present in Asia. Our efforts at Communication in Interreligious dialogue must result in spreading the values of justice, peace and harmony. Building on the basic principle of love taught by every religion, we need to create a culture of dialogue in action, caring for the poor and the oppressed, and seeking to assure justice for all everywhere.
5. Our parishes, houses of formation, dioceses and Episcopal conferences must foster a culture of dialogue to prepare people and equip them with the necessary skills to engage in dialogue at all levels and thus contribute to a culture of peace and harmony.

Recommendations

In the light of the above Orientations, we made the following recommendations which are to be adapted to regional and local needs, and situations in Asia:

General

Our communication in Interreligious dialogue should especially deal with prejudice, stereotyping or misrepresentation of religions. Efforts must be made to avoid polarizations, which lead to needless tensions and misunderstandings.

We need to involve ourselves in common initiatives in print, radio, television, internet, music and any other forms of communication.

We should develop a pastoral plan for Interreligious dialogue and Communication at the Episcopal conference, diocesan and parish levels.

We should promote greater ecumenical collaboration in developing better and more convincing Interreligious Communication activities and studies. At the same time, we should exercise prudence in dealing with extreme, fundamentalist groups.

We can profit from the richness of grassroots dialogue among women, given their natural ability for communication and dialogue.

Formation

Teaching the communication dimension in Interreligious dialogue calls especially for creative efforts in our seminaries, houses of religious formation, Catholic schools and institutions of higher learning, catechetical, lay ministry and adult faith formation programs.

Communication dispositions for Interreligious dialogue should be integrated into the formation of priests, religious and catechists to make our ministries more effective. Especially children and young people should be introduced and educated in Communication for Interreligious dialogue.

Resources for Communication in Interreligious dialogue should be developed for all levels of the Church.

Particular

Greetings, messages and participation in festivals and celebrations of other religions, as well as cultural exchanges through the arts and music, should be part of our life. To increase understanding of other religions, their activities and concerns should be reflected in our own media. Communicators must be supported in their efforts for Interreligious dialogue.

Basic Christian Communities should develop into Basic *Human* Communities.

We should communicate our common concerns, which are based on shared values e.g. through joint statements of leaders from different religions. We should be united in our efforts to promote human rights, and address especially issues of poverty, injustice, and violence.

Bishops, as spiritual leaders, need to be at the fore-front of Interreligious dialogue, avoiding divisions in and outside the Church.

Existing communication centers should be open and available for communication in Interreligious dialogue beyond their local and Church affi-

liations. Centers for research on communication in Interreligious dialogue should be established, and „Communication Education“ in Interreligious dialogue promoted.