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Unda: Catholic Broadcasting in Asia

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Review Article

*UNDA: Catholic Broadcasting in Asia**

UNDA, the Latin word for wave, is the name given to the Catholic International Association for Radio and Television, with headquarters in Switzerland. With the rapid growth of radio and television in Asia, the need for organization and cooperation among Asian broadcasters becomes urgent. Aside from a few successes, there are many isolated efforts, but with little strength and overall effect. UNDA in Asia seems the answer. This brief article hopes first, to relate the events of one week in June 1967, which laid the basis for cooperation among Asian Catholic broadcasters and prepared the structure for UNDA in Asia; and second, to offer an evaluation of the conference and its published proceedings, *Unda Conference for Asia*.

THE CONFERENCE

It may seem strange that a conference of Christian communicators should be held in an area that is predominantly Muslim; that in this meeting of mostly Catholic broadcasters, the most eloquent speakers should be Protestants; and that delegates from twelve Asian nations and several international organizations should travel all the way to a small rural municipality, in order to discuss the technical aspects of broadcasting. And yet these three contrasts made the First Interna-

* UNDA CONFERENCE FOR ASIA, edited by James B. Reuter, S.J. Makati: Cultural Printing Press, 1967. 342 pp. Photo essay by Robert Friedrich, S.J.

the conference by radio over DXMS and DXND, and came from their sickbeds to the conference to deliver their position papers. It came out in the hot debates on nationalism, politics and the complexities of modern bureaucracies — even in the passion for the facts and the truth. It showed in the calm, religious depth of the Protestant communicators whose sharing of experiences in Asian broadcasting was enriching, edifying and ecumenical. It expressed itself even in the efforts of the new broadcasters—students taping dramas from midnight to early morning, after the station had signed off; the laborious scripting of spots in eight Philippine dialects; an “elaborate” transmitting antenna mounted on top of an old telephone pole; a student nun who works part-time as a disc jockey. The intense, yet intimate spirit of this international conference is probably unrivalled.

Running parallel to the conference schedule was a series of unscheduled, spontaneous small group meetings, where person-to-person and nation-to-nation commitments were sealed. Contacts were made for various elements of broadcasting: production, training of personnel, choosing and purchasing of equipment, location and construction of transmitters, station maintenance and operation, program exchange, short wave and medium wave technicalities, scholarships, grants and foundations. Thus, the openness at the conference table catalyzed many interpersonal dealings. Later these groups were formed into task forces to present practical resolutions to the full assembly.

One of these task forces, UNDA in Asia, worked on the “mighty turbine”: Asian cooperation and coordination in broadcasting. The structure for UNDA in Asia was drafted and approved by the body, pending official recognition from the UNDA Headquarters in Switzerland. This recognition was obtained recently, thus making UNDA in Asia an officially recognized organization. Bishop Mongeau was unanimously elected Chairman. The other officers of UNDA in Asia are: James F. Hyatt, M.M., President; Joseph Nethisinghe, Vice-President; James B. Reuter, S.J., Executive Secretary. Member nations are: Ceylon, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan,

Korea, Micronesia, New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of China (Taiwan), Thailand, and Republic of Viet Nam. The Executive Office is located in Manila (National Office for Mass Media, Ateneo de Manila, Padre Faura).

Summing up the conference, one may say its success was due to the spirit of practical ecumenism. For this resulted not only in formulating a plan for Asian cooperation, but also in a living experience of friendship and dialogue with those of other nations and other beliefs.

THE DOCUMENTS

The intimacy and intensity mentioned above showed also in the style of the papers delivered and discussed at the conference. They make easy reading for the novice broadcaster and the layman. Even the formal papers do not get entangled in the technical jargon of scientists and experts. In fact, one may get the impression that some of these reports are not scientific or scholarly at all. But since religious broadcasting in Asia established itself without too much assistance or influence from the academies and universities, it is not surprising that most of the delegates, being chiefly self-made men, expressed themselves in straightforward terms. For the need was not so much for complex theories, technical data and esoteric concepts—although as communications systems grow, these too are necessary—but rather for a practical exchange of ideas on the part of several stymied broadcasters.

The human-interest aspects of the conference were brought out by "The Character of the Conference." Humorous, yet deeply touching, this sketch underscored with subtle irony the vital issues of the five-day meeting. Even more intriguing are the "Minutes of the Conference." These give a blow-by-blow account of the activities of the week, in an informal, captivating style. They were edited from the complete tape recording of the sessions. These include the hot debates and many of the otherwise unrecorded events.

The general outline of the papers (which followed the schema of the conference) is both practical and climactic. It begins with survey reports from the different Asian, European

and American delegates, ending with the reports of the Federation of Catholic Broadcasters on the twelve local stations, and Radio Veritas. In addition to numerous details, these reports give the following general picture of Catholic broadcasting in Asia:

1. Almost all Asian nations are seriously hampered by government control of radio and television broadcasting. Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, the Philippines and Taiwan are the only countries with a relative amount of freedom either in production or in actual broadcasting.

2. Ceylon is constructing a production center, but has very little broadcasting time on the government stations. They depend very greatly on external transmission sources.

3. Hong Kong has highly developed governmental and commercial radio-television services. This tiny colony has great potential for broadcasting to mainland China.

4. Religious programming is tightly limited by All India Radio's policies. Only 41 hours out of 128,000 in a typical year are given to such programming. Television is relatively new and still in the experimental stages.

5. Indonesia seems to be mass-producing student stations. There are over 200 in the city of Djakarta and 300 more in the rest of the island of Java. One Catholic radio-television production center has been set up in Djakarta, but has grossly amateur equipment and mostly self-trained personnel.

6. Japan has probably the world's most advanced radio and television studios, managed by the government's NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation). The Good Shepherd Movement produces 25% of all religious programs, despite the government reluctance to admit religious fare to its radio and television broadcasts.

7. In Korea, the Protestant Church has five major stations saturating most of the nation and even reaching two-thirds of the way into North Korea. Catholic broadcasting has been quite active over government and commercial stations.

8. Micronesia has a limited number of religious programs on all the government stations. But for greater scope in programming, a Catholic station is needed. The territory is greatly handicapped by lack of receivers.

9. Taiwan has excellent studios at Kuang-Chi for both radio and television. The Kuang-Chi production studios supply all the government stations and some Vietnamese and Philippine stations as well.

10. Catholic broadcasting in Thailand is just beginning. It is greatly dependent on external transmission, because of tight governmental policies.

11. Catholic programs over the government stations in Viet Nam date back to 1957. Television has just begun, but is advancing rapidly.

12. The Philippines is fortunate to be Christian, democratic and open to free enterprise. These factors account for the rise of twelve local stations owned and managed by the Catholic Church in addition to Radio Veritas which has a 50,000 watt local transmitter and two 100,000 watt transmitters for short wave overseas broadcasting. The Philippine Federation of Catholic Broadcasters has thus far succeeded in effecting a national franchise for the Philippine Bishops for radio and television media; script service for broadcasters; and seminars in radio production and broadcasting. Its aims for the future are: greater mutual assistance in financing, management and establishment of stations; a survey of programming throughout the country; program exchange; rural development; adult education; catechetics; and production centers.

With all the difficulties experienced by Asian countries in setting up stations or trying to squeeze into commercial and governmental programming, Radio Veritas seemed to be the hope of Asia. Here were production centers, training centers, experienced personnel, far-reaching short wave and medium wave transmission equipment, numerous possibilities for international cooperative broadcasting. On the other hand, it was disappointing to discover that Radio Veritas had not yet gone on the air, and that there were numerous technical difficulties involved in overseas broadcasting.¹ The most pressing problem was that transistor radios have radically changed the listening habits of Asia: local, medium wave broadcasts are preferable to far-off short wave transmissions which require delicate tuning and are easily subject to noise interference from atmospheric changes or from deliberate or accidental jamming from other stations.

The rest of the conference documents is devoted to specific topics, summarized here under the following topics: short

¹ Radio Veritas started its test broadcast in August 1967, at 50,000 watts, medium wave, beamed to the Philippines. Having completed its test broadcast, Radio Veritas is now broadcasting on a regular program schedule. Overseas broadcasting is still under experimentation and testing.

wave transmission, international broadcasting, production and training centers, rural development programming, religious broadcasting and financial aid. The position papers from the national and international organizations represented contributed significantly to the overall picture of broadcasting problems and experiences in Asia.

EVALUATION

It is important to recall the precise scope of this conference in order to evaluate properly the results and impact of both the conference and the documents. For although the scope of the conference is religious broadcasting, it is by no means limited to pious content. The success of Radio Sutatenza, established in 1947 in Bogota, Colombia, set the pace for the new Catholic broadcasters. This was a small mountain station managed by Right Rev. Jose Joaquin Salcedo. In twenty years, Radio Sutatenza has helped to educate 3,000,000 *campesinos*. At present its four radio stations beam lessons in literacy, religion and culture throughout Colombia and to nearby countries. The thrust of religious broadcasting today originates from this same pulse.

Gospel programs, novenas, church music and purely religious services today must share program time with, and even give way to rural programs, adult education, cultural fare, school broadcasts, documentaries and newscasting—in a word, all the aspects of education, culture and information. Thus, although the scope of this conference was limited to religious broadcasting, this type of broadcasting has expanded its formerly narrow vision.

This wider scope of religious broadcasting is also the mind of Vatican II, as stated in the Decree on the Media of Social Communication, December 4, 1963:

Among the wonderful technological discoveries which men of talent, especially in the present era, have made with God's help, the Church welcomes and promotes with special interest those which have uncovered new avenues of communicating most readily news, views and teachings of every sort. The most important of these inventions are those media which...reach and influence not only individuals, but the very masses

and the whole of human society, and thus can rightly be called the media of social communication. (Introduction, par. 1.)

This decree, although lacking specific recommendations and more thorough treatment of the possibilities of mass media for social development, nevertheless has succeeded in promoting an increase of interest and participation in the works of social communication among the members of the Church. The present age has only begun to realize the potentialities of radio and television for social development. Realization and publication of this new dimension of social communication are the first fruits of this conference and its documents which make up the book, *Unda Conference for Asia*.

The second advantage of this book is its readily available information. The survey reports of religious broadcasting give an overall picture of the situation in Asia and Oceania. One can see both the possibilities and the hindrances of communications, whether for a local or an international audience. In addition, there are six specific articles on rural broadcasting, including one on Radio Sutatenza, and a statement on the program of Unesco (Paris) in the field of mass media. These offer many new insights on program planning, coordination with existing agencies, working in the socio-cultural context of the audience. The information on religious broadcasting (in the new, wider meaning) in Asia makes this book an indispensable source for both the communications students and the professional broadcaster.

Because of the ecumenical spirit of the conference and the wider meaning of religious broadcasting, *Unda Conference for Asia* is not a book for the religious communicator alone. Since the Catholic effort in broadcasting concerns the most human aspects of man, his cultural and spiritual development,—and this, despite creed or race—this book should engage anyone who is committed to mass media and national development. This conference and its documents are two efforts in Asia designed to fulfill the insight of Pope Paul VI, in his encyclical, *The Progress of Peoples*: "Development is the new word for peace."

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