

11-1-1995

1995 Vol. 51: Spiritans and Communication

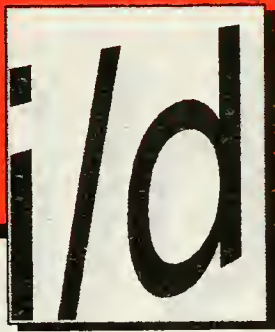
General Council

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dsc.duq.edu/id>

Repository Citation

General Council. (1995). 1995 Vol. 51: Spiritans and Communication. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/id/55>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the ID and Anima Una at Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in Information Documentation by an authorized administrator of Duquesne Scholarship Collection.



INFORMATION DOCUMENTATION

C.S. Sp / Clivo di Cinna 195 / 00136 Roma Italia

I/D 51

GENERAL COUNCIL

NOVEMBER 1995

SPIRITANS AND COMMUNICATION.

"I make an appeal to all Catholic Organisations, to Religious Congregations and Movements and particularly to both national and international Episcopal Conferences to work to develop the presence of the Church in the Media." The Pope's Message for the World Day of Communication 1992.

ARE SPIRITANS COMMUNICATORS ?

They should be! By our missionary vocation each member of the Congregation, dedicated to the Holy Spirit, the communicator per excellence, is called to communicate. Our first obligation is to proclaim the "Good News". The "Good News" can be communicated in many different ways.

1. *The means used.*

The most common means of communication is the homily and sermon. Well prepared and adapted to the local culture, the sermon can have an important impact.

Many Christian communities use drama and acting. These help to integrate the message of the Bible into the daily lives of the people. Dramatisation of the Bible passages on Christmas night is widespread. In Bangassou in the Central African Republic, every Friday during Lent, slide shows were presented in the Cathedral depicting different biblical events. These shows were well patronised. No doubt the same is happening elsewhere.

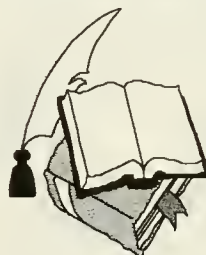
In Cameroon, African artists have painted a series of posters which are used in catechist courses. Fr. Paul

Cuypers in his Bible course for Pygmies uses statuettes representing the scenes to be treated. The Pygmies themselves have sculptured these statuettes.

Spiritans are working in the training of catechists in many countries. As a help in the preparation of their catechesis, the catechists receive a bulletin explaining the relevant topics.

In many parishes, the faithful get a parish newsletter. This gives information not only about the parish activities but also a short explanation of the liturgy.

The confrere responsible for the library in the Generalate remarked that he was pleasantly surprised to find such a big number of books written by Spiritans on a wide variety different of subjects.



The majority of Spiritans still remember the film "Le Missionnaire". The aim of this film was to inform the public about missionary work. Other films have

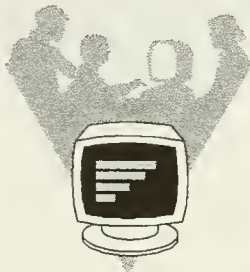
dealt with other missionary themes. Good films on the Bible are used regularly in courses on Scripture.

2. Modern techniques

Methods of communication are developing. A number of Spiritans are open to the use of more modern technical means of communication. The Itaïci Chapter was very conscious of this. (Document Itaïci 33,2.2) It encouraged the General Council to stimulate the use of modern methods of information and communication apt to evoke response and dialogue. In order to respond to Itaïci and to know what exactly is being done, confreres actively involved

in Social Communications, were invited through "Spiritan News" to make themselves known. About fifty answered. The answers showed an enormous variety of activities.

What follows is information on what some of these confreres are doing.



Brazil. John Kilcrann is linked with an international

network which gives him access to around ninety countries and many thousands of subscribers. In his letter to us he says that the system is being used by many religious and Justice and Peace groups. He is convinced that the Congregation would benefit a lot by adapting the system for our internal communication.

Senegal: J. Vast, J. Lambrecht and A. Duteil work in the "Centre Daniel Brottier". In the centre one finds film documentation, a video library, the secretariat for the magazines: "l'Echo de St. Louis" et "Unir Cinéma", a small printing press and all the equipment that is required for making videos. The complex is sufficiently equipped to establish a centre for training in audio-visual and media communication. Fr Vast has received the medal of the Legion of Honour for his work. The centre has also won international prizes.

Gambia: D. Murray. "The Gambia is a country without TV. However, there are very few people who do not have access to a radio. We have managed to install our own studio. We produce and "package" our own programmes for broadcast by the

radio stations. Living in a predominantly Muslim country we are lucky to have free "air-time" on the national radio station. We have also free "air-time" on a private radio station. However the studio is mainly used for the production of audio-cassettes with a catechetical programme in six of the local languages. Most people are non-literate. Therefore the accuracy of verbal catechetical instruction is of the highest importance. Audio tapes are a help. So we

equip our catechists with audio tapes which they will play during catechetical sessions. A series of posters depicting the subject treated on the tapes are sent with the tapes."

"Modern" is often equated with "good, up-to-date, effective" whereas "traditional" is linked with "dull, old-fashioned and ineffective".

Kenya. Joseph Kelly. "I have never taken a course in Communications but I have been involved in them ever since I put out a class newspaper in lower primary school. Some of my involvement since then has included: newspaper work, a diocesan bulletin, giving workshops, establishing a network of correspondents for national and international radio stations, giving a course during the last semester on Social Communications in the Spiritan Missionary Seminary in Arusha."

Nigeria. B. Theriault. "The newspaper 'The Light' was founded by a Spiritan in 1962 and appeared regularly until some time during the Nigerian War. Its resumption in 1991 was the result of repeated requests by the lay people and clergy of the diocese."

Ireland. S. Galvin. "About twenty local radio stations have been opened in Ireland in the past few years and the Church has become involved in this area of communication. I have become a member of the Religious Broadcasters' Association and it gives me the opportunity of promoting the missionary aspect of the Church by co-operating with others. I also make myself available for interviews on missionary topics and introduce personalities from abroad."



Many confreres are also aware that modern techniques are not a panacea, giving automatic solutions to all the problems. Frank Naughton from Pakistan writes: "Modern means of communication! 'Modern' is often equated with 'good,' 'up-to-date', 'effective'; whereas

'traditional' is linked with 'dull', 'old fashioned' and 'ineffective'. 'Appropriate' is a more inclusive word and focuses less on the technology and more on the content, the sender, the receiver and the context. The best programs are those which are 1. experiential, 2. participative, 3. learning rather than teaching

events, 4. based on the principle of keeping it simple, 5. based on available resources, 6. group-oriented, 7. interesting 8. engaging. Rather than being communicators, we might be better off being people who facilitate the communications of others."

MASS MEDIA, A DANGER OR AN ANSWER ?

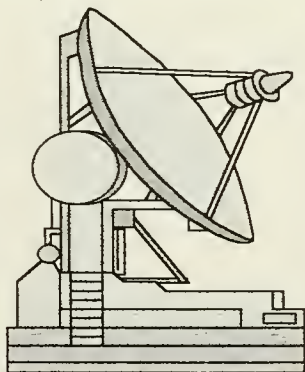
It is the mass media which has seen the fastest development in recent years. By the term "mass media" is understood "an entity of methods and techniques permitting the diffusion to a vast and heterogeneous audience either in writing or audio-visual." (Larousse). When the term mass media is used today it refers in most cases to radio and television.

1. *Media, a change in life?*

It is worth noting that the mass media influence our way of looking at the events and the interpretation we give them. Our concept of time, of history, of personal responsibility, of what is new and even our concept of the "Good News" and of the Church, runs the risk of changing. The messages reach us directly without intermediary. Often they are very attractive, singing their song in unison and absorbing our whole attention.

It is evident that in a world marked by the means of communication, even the style of religious life changes. What is more, the language we religious use, as well as the relations between ourselves and reality, change. We must retain our former roots and at the same time it is impossible to avoid the new means of communication which create a new culture. We live our religious and apostolic life in this new world. We must announce the 'Good News' to this very world and awaken it to the presence of God in its midst.

International radio and TV give instant and immediate news of what is happening in the world, in our home countries as well in the countries where we are working. The news we hear is discussed at breakfast. A radio is now considered a personal belonging. In more and more countries, confreres come to the television room before retiring



at night. The television room is a place to meet. In many of our communities throughout the world, there is a periodfor sharing before and after the news.

Our concept of time, history, personal responsibility, of what is new and even our concept of the "Good News" and of the Church runs the risk of changing.

In those countries where the newspapers arrive daily, a strike is felt immediately.

Such is our habit of getting the latest news daily.

The telephone and the fax have shortened distances but they tend to force us also to take quick decisions without sufficient reflection. Electronic Mail gives us contact with museums, libraries and universities. It makes it possible to discuss common interests with interested parties anywhere in the world.

2. *Discernment and media awareness.*

Itaïci spoke a lot about communication and encouraged the General Council to "look out for new forms of communication and information, more apt to draw responses and exchanges". Words like "listen", "respect", "dialogue" etc. appear regularly in its deliberations. On the other hand, although Itaïci itself used the media to communicate its deliberations, yet the influence of the media does not appear in its analysis of the world in which we live.

The Church has drawn attention many times to this new reality in our daily life. Also we, as Spiritans, can ask ourselves if we have become sufficiently conscious of the media and the implication of its

presence for our spirituality, our community life and our mission.

Of course there are dangers. Television shows events while, at the same time, leading us to

forget what it does not show. The repetition of a message well presented tends to be accepted uncritically on our part.

It may be true that for many of us, all these means of communication make it difficult to understand the world around us. Every day there is something new coming on the market. The computer adds futuristic components, unimaginable a short time earlier, to what we already know. The world of the multimedia will be a reality in the lives of all of us in the not too distant future. It is so already for most of us.

Some confreres living in this new reality, have already thought about how they are to act and to

react. We take an example from among many; the *Centre Pédagogique Audio-Visuel* in Haiti. R. Soler is the co-ordinator. There people learn to understand

the media by direct experiences. 85% of the population of the country of 5.000.000 are illiterate. Most of

them are young. Access to the world of the written is denied them.

If we must live our religious life in a world with its modern culture, it is urgent that we take stock, reflect and establish criteria governing our relationship to the media, its utilisation and the place we give it in our personal and community lives. We must not simply allow ourselves to be formed by the media. We must train ourselves and others to have a critical conscience vis-à-vis the media and so to be capable of exercising an influence on the world of mass communications.

In many of our communities there is a period before and after the news.

The instant, the spectacular, fragmentation, simplification, world-wide coverage, profits and competition are the principal characteristics of information systems which are structurally incapable of distinguishing the true from the false.

(Monde Diplomatique, March 1994.)

By intensive application of photography and video the living experience of the moment risks being of secondary importance to the technical recording of the moment. (Prof. Berden, Utrecht.)

PERENNIAL QUESTIONS THAT CHALLENGE US.

1. *Why communicate?*

“The work of God is principally a work of communication. The inner life of the Trinity itself seems to consist in communication. The work of creation is a continuing work of communication, as existence itself is continually being communicated to all of God’s creatures. The work of revelation is surely a work of communication. The Incarnation is THE communication. In the Church, it is our responsibility to communicate the truth and love of Jesus Christ.” (Mgr. J. Foley, President of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications)

Our Spiritan Rule of Life begins with a quotation from the Gospel of St. Luke, 4: 18-19.

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me to bring the Good News to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord.”

The Spiritan Rule of Life 16.1 states:

“So that the Christian witness may become integrated in the culture, reach people from within and become a force for liberation in their contemporary history, we strive in every way we can for a fruitful coming together of local cultural and religious traditions with the gospel of Christ.” See also SRL 1,2,3,11,13,45.

“The Church must be the champion of spiritual values. She must be truly the voice of the authentic, the real, the permanent and the spiritual. That is why the Church must make its voice heard. It must use to the full all the means of mass communications available in such a way that they become a light and a leaven in the name of Christ.” (Mgr. Kalilombé, Malawi)

Using the methods of communication only is not enough. We must research to find the best methods and we must recognise the mass media as being an authentic means of evangelization and human development.. (Mgr. Andoh, Ghana)

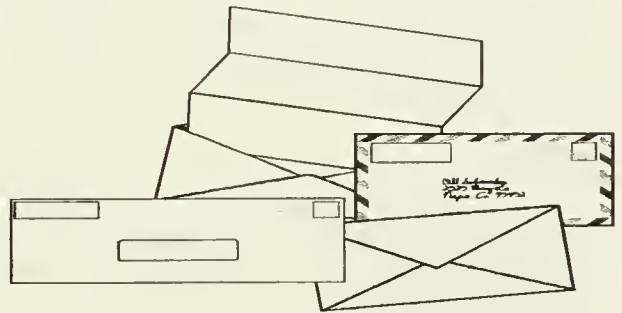
2. Communicate, yes but how?

“There are two different things: On the one hand is the content and on the other a technology opening up vast possibilities. The technology has developed enormously. Has the content moved in step with the technology?” (J. Hogema, CSSp.)

Sister Marlene Scholz (Zimbabwe) wonders: “how can we communicate the content of our faith with means of communication formed and based in the culture?” She says she has come up with this response: “The faith culture of the Western world is too oriented to the written word and particularly towards books. It could follow other directions with a far greater effect especially in Africa but also in Europe. In evangelization we should make much more use of artistic expression like the plastic arts, poetry, music, drama and dancing. We must work with the means available on the spot not only to announce the gospel but also as a support for the faith.”

“Communication includes a source of information which produces a message. Communication includes also a transmitter who treats the message in such a way as to make it transmittable. A channel is needed which is the medium used to transmit the signal from the transmitter to the receiver. The receiver then reconstructs the message from the signal. Finally communication includes a recipient to whom the message is directed.” (I.D. 9. Nov. 1973)

The message has to be translated into the language understood by those to whom the message is directed and it has to be adapted to the means they have at their disposal. The methods used will be determined by the aims, objective and target group.



a. The spoken word.

The spoken word is used most in communication. For a long time to come, it will be the method used in our mission particularly in the developing world. It is the cheapest and within everybody's grasp. It is so simple that we forget about it when speaking about communicating the gospel.

“An example of the importance of the spoken word is the catechist. He is not a person of exalted position nor is he weighted down with gadgets. He has not been trained to play on people's feelings or



to seduce with sweet words. He is the man of a powerful “Word”. He has been trained to speak a word, based on relevant experience and finding resonance in the daily lives of his listeners. He is the man of the Word of God for daily life. Initiated into the Christian life, the catechist is also one who can communicate the spirit of Africa by drawing on the riches of the local culture.” (P. Schouver, CSSp in “Medias Missionnaires” 1st trimestre 1993.)

b. The written word

This seems to be catered for reasonably well. When we look at our Congregation, some circumscriptions publish one, two or three magazines. "In Europe alone there are 675.000 subscribers to Spiritan magazines, reviews and bulletins and the annual print run is 2.200.000. One thing is clear; this is a job that must be taken seriously. It would be wrong to treat it lightly. We have a duty towards our subscribers of doing the job as seriously and as professionally as it deserves" Letter of Fr. Wijnen CSSp, July 14, 1993: Spiritan News No. 94.

The following are the European magazines to which the numbers above mentioned subscribe: "Pentecôte

sur le monde" Belgium, France and Switzerland; "ECHO de la Mission" and "Revue de St. Joseph" France; "Encontro" and "Acção Missionária" Portugal; "Kontinente" Germany; "Missionwide" England; "Outlook" Ireland; "Bijeen" Netherlands; "Missioneros Espiritanos" Spain and "Poslaniec" Poland.

c. Audio-visual

The use of slides, audio cassettes, video, radio as well as TV has grown quickly. This equipment can be found in many of our Spiritan communities. Very

often they are not fully used because of a lack of formation and/or training. In order to answer to this need, circumscriptions have either set up their own training programmes or sent members to centres elsewhere.

We find an example of this in CIM (Centre d'Information Missionnaire) in our Mother House in Rue Lhomond, Paris, where our confreres Fr.-X. Roussel and L.-M. Frioux work. CIM describes itself as a Multimedia Service with the following objectives: assure through its library, the collection, production and diffusion of educational material in the cultural, catechetical, theological, health and social areas of the different countries; put at the disposal of confreres its technology

and offer training in audio-visual and computers to those responsible for projects, enabling them to produce suitable programmes; have available to confreres and dioceses, training, advice and material adapted to each situation; assure the collection and the preservation of photo negatives and slides from the countries in which Spiritans work; produce on request whatever may be asked; give information and a training; advise on purchasing and buying materials in the fast developing computer area; build up a video library; be in relationship with funding agencies and show how to write up and present a project for aid.

80% of all communication is non verbal. It is through our lives that the most frequent and most important communication happens

3. At the heart of communication.

We must never forget that 80% of all communication is non verbal. The most frequent and most important communication is through our lives. It is the communication of ourselves. We walk here in the footsteps of Him whom we proclaim. Jesus announced the Good News and in the final analysis he communicated Himself. He even made a gift of his life: "take and eat all of you, this is my body".

MEDIA, A CHALLENGE FOR EVERYONE?

Taken alone, the technological means are not the most important element in communication. Nevertheless their presence is a reality and they are important. We would be flying in the face of reality should we ignore their existence. But how do we react when we read remarks such as: "The information system is perverted: dominated by television, trapped by the apparent, it shows without understanding. It excludes from the

sphere of the real that it does not show." (Time, 21 February 1994)



"Complaining about bad media coverage is a vital part of the process of getting good media coverage. The media always have an eye to the consumer. If a story is wrong whether through inaccuracy, distortion or unfairness, it is important that the journalist be told so. It is important that the inaccurate facts are

pinpointed. People complain about the media across the pub counter or in the local supermarket, but very few take the trouble to lodge an accurate complaint about the offending item. When making a complaint the currency to deal in is facts. (Intercom, October 1984)

The article in "Intercom" tells us that the media are very sensitive to criticism from the public. If that is true, it says that we can have a certain influence on what they present.

Before we complain about what the media present, we must know what in fact they do present. This is not easy. Having some feelings about it is not enough. Those who do complain are quickly put in their place by communication professionals if their complaints are poorly formulated or incorrect in details.

"Intercom" puts us on our guard. "The opportunity to preach the Good News is always available. Are we using this opportunity to the fullest possible extent? If we are not, then blaming the media for our problems is a very poor substitute" (Intercom, October 1984)



Certainly, the media challenge us. They can be used as a means of indoctrination, exploitation and

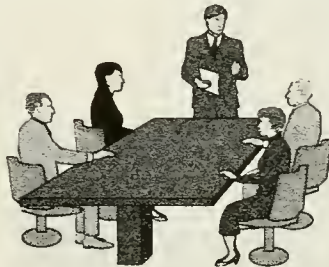
domination. But they offer as well the possibility of expressing our deepest feelings. They can help us to reach out to a far wider public, opening to them the witness of our most firmly held convictions. We should view the media in this light. We need to move forward. Is it not time to apply fully what "Aetates Novae" said to us? "Education and training in the media of communication should form an integral part of the training of priests and pastoral agents."

It is clear that it is necessary to educate as many people as possible to understand the techniques and the language used by the media as well as to understand the media itself. With such a background knowledge, reaction will be to the point. It will bring more ease and confidence. The necessity to be exact, to make comparisons, to make inquiries and competent research will bring precise results. This knowledge will moreover, help us to live our lives more aware of the reality around us. In this way more people will be able to benefit from the teaching of the Church as well as from human development in general. Our work for Justice and Peace will also profit because we will know

better how to communicate and to make ourselves understood.

"We want ourselves to be listeners, committed to the search for all kinds of information. For this we depend on the sources of information, but we want to be actors in order to respond to events, to participate in the formation of public opinion and to be part of conscientisation, convinced that public opinion is a responsible and powerful means for change." (Action Catholique pour l'Abolition de la Torture)

All Spiritans agree that newspapers, fax, radio, computers and TV are part of to-day's culture. The Pope, bishops and laity speak about the importance of communication through the media. Consequently we must take the issue seriously. In the words of McLuhan "The medium is the message" and the message must be integrated into the new medium.



Being missionaries, we are presented with an important task. We have responsibilities on different levels. By vocation we are communicators, bearers

of a message. How are we to be sure on our side that communication is adapted to the situation in the society in which we live ?

Those confreres who have an electronic mail address are kindly invited to communicate it to the Generalate in Rome.

Whenever a confrere produces a work in communication eg. has produced a video or audio cassette, has written a book, a play, etc. he is kindly asked to inform the Generalate. Others will be interested!

We are facing a big challenge. However, we are ideally placed to respond to it. We work in many nations and many cultures. By their mission, Spiritans are involved in communicating the Gospel both by the witness of their lifestyle and by preaching and teaching. To help them in their mission, they may or may not use technology. Becoming better trained in the use of the media will help us to inculcate the “message” at all levels of society and in a language that can be understood. Even the use of modern techniques has to be adapted to our audience.

In the beginning of this paper it was mentioned that about fifty confreres communicated directly with the Generalate saying that they were committed to social communications. Does each Spiritan know who is the nearest confrere with experience in this field? In some circumscriptions such a confrere may not be available but there are probably others (religious, diocesan or lay) working in communications.

It is important to integrate the experience of these confreres into the mission of the whole circumscription where this is not yet the case. It could help others who are working on a smaller or

We want to live our mission and our religious life in fidelity to the Holy Spirit. That fidelity has led the Spiritans to take on many services in the Church during a long history of almost three hundred years. It has also shaped our Spiritan Life. The Incarnation of the Word of God in history, accomplished in Jesus, continues in the Church and in humanity. The Incarnation is exciting because it is through it that God reveals himself to men and women of all time. Revelation and its realisation, evangelization, has always the same content but the methods of its transmission are determined by the culture of those who receive and of those who proclaim. Evangelization is always done in the concrete.

more local basis. It would be worthwhile investigating the possibility of organising sessions to pool experiences to see how local means already available, can be used more effectively. It will be for the sake of the Mission, for the sake of preaching the Message of the Good News.

CONCLUSION.

Perhaps some confreres, reading this paper will think that it is not written for them believing that they are too old or live in areas too remote, or because they have no talents for it or no means to get involved in modern technology of communication. But what has been said earlier is equally valid for all: the basis of communication is our person. As long as we are alive, there is always room for improvement. We are convinced that we have a mission as a Congregation, a very important message to communicate to a world yearning for meaning. Should we not use all the means available?

