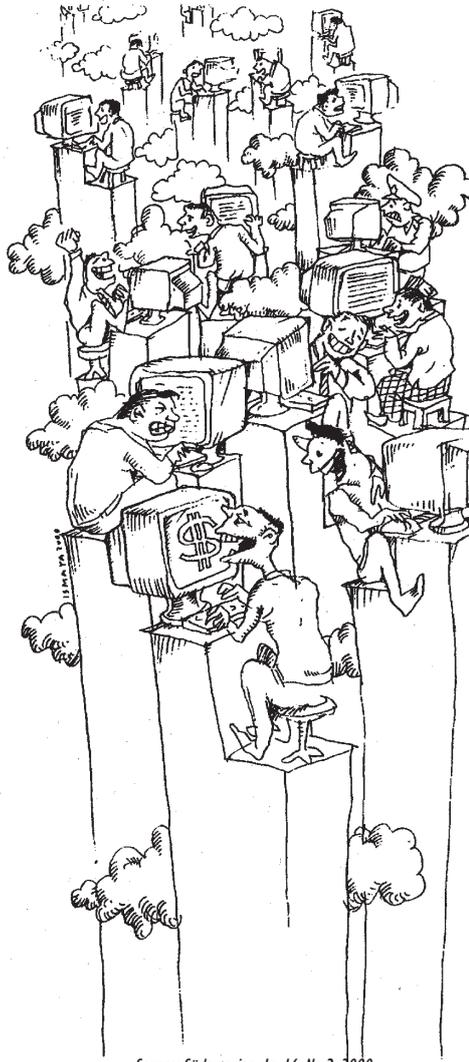


3/4

2000

SPECIAL ISSUE

INTERNET



Source: Südstasien, Jg. 16, No.2, 2000

Introduction

Talking about new technologies in today's world usually means talking about the Internet. The World Wide Web changes our whole understanding of communications. For some, the Internet is the solution to all problems related to information access and disposability, for others it is mainly a new expression of „communication imperialism“, to widen the gap between the rich and the poor. During the past few months, a lot has been written on the Internet and development, reflecting critically on the Internet and its chances and risks for the so-called Third World. We don't want to add just one more publication on this topic.

This special issue of our Mediaforum is to provide the opportunity to share concrete experiences on how the Internet can be used in the field of pastoral and social development, without avoiding or concealing principle questions related to this medium. Are we ready to familiarise ourselves with the new dynamics of the Internet, or do we use it only as an additional instrument to circulate the same contents as before? How do we, as Church representatives and NGO's handle the risks of growing information and thus knowledge gaps between the south and the north due to problems of access to adequate telecommunication facilities? How do we face the danger of an information flood and weakened quality control of the contents provided, contents dominated mainly by the interests of the western hemisphere? How do we react to the new expectations and requirements concerning speed and topicality of information? How does Internet deal with history and private memories?

We invited communicators from different continents to share their experiences with the use of Internet. You will find quite a variety of initiatives and reflections - certainly not at all representative, but surely broadening our view on possibilities and also limitations.

There is no doubt that the new developments in the field of telecommunications are a great challenge for the Church and NGO's. Internet has the potential to facilitate networking and to make the voices of base groups, local communities and NGO's heard internationally, thus strengthening a world-wide solidarity. Internet allows the Church to reach people who no longer have a direct relationship with her. It facilitates effective communication at a low price. This publication wishes to contribute to the exchange of information on how the Church and NGO's in the south and in the east beyond the western world make use of the potentials and face their limitations.

Daniela Frank
Executive Director
CAMECO

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Networks for Communion

The Computer Network of the Church in Latin America

by Leticia Soberón Mainero, Pontifical Council for Social Communication

The Challenge of a new Culture

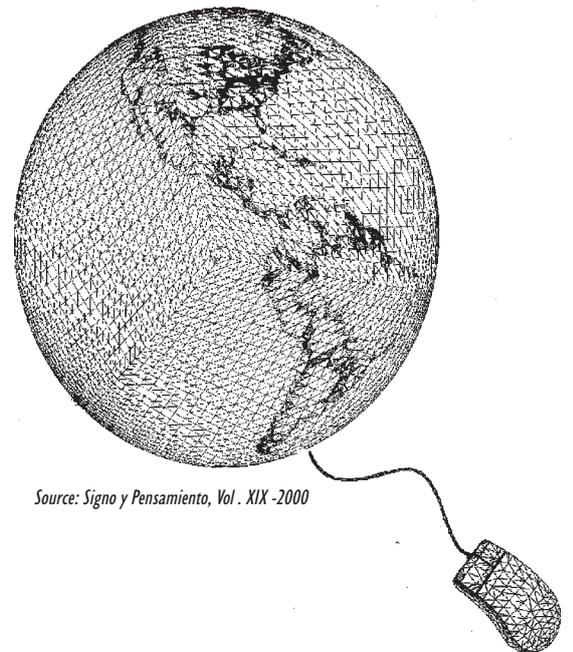
The famous «digital culture» is strongly connected to technology, however, it is much more than just technology. We all know that those who remain outside this cultural wave will be excluded from the great patrimony of culture - and surely of economy - in the third millennium. The technological innovation race doesn't know where it is going yet. Thousands of people seek to improve programmes and machines, but... what do they mean with improve? Where is their horizon? Technological development ends in nonsense if it lacks a correct anthropology and the light of the Gospel.

That is why living in the “digital culture”, means not only surrendering the fear of computers and learning how to manage some programmes. It is also necessary to understand the way it transforms peoples' lives and their ways of understanding the world. We need to discover the key to this culture, to synthesise them and give a rich feed-back. So that Christians may at the same time be “beneficiaries and promoters” of that culture in many different places.

Our experiences in Latin America consist of using technological innovations, putting them at the service of communication and communion; we have tried to generate - at least in the Church context - a culture of solidarity, enhancing the same technological development (communion and progress!). In other words, the Church has been present in this culture in such a way that it could emerge with a particular impression in many communities of Latin America. At the same time the rising culture made its mark on the pastoral work of the Church. That is why she is, in many places, both the promoter and the result of the digital era.

Red Informática de la Iglesia en América Latina (RIIAL): A short History

Ten years ago in Latin America computers were used in big companies, universities and research centres. Just a few Church offices had one, and some people thought that the world would continue communicating through ordinary mail or through the - at the time - revolutionary fax. Before long it became clear that computers would multiply there as much as they would in other areas of the world, and furthermore they could be used as «tools for communication», through a new technology called “telematics”. The Pontifical Council for Social Communications and the Latin American Bishops' Council (CELAM) saw that the Church in Latin America would have enormous advantages from those technical achievements which appeared on the horizon. It made great sense in such a vast continent. As long as the societies there were starting the «natural» process of introducing computers in their everyday work, the Church should not be



Source: *Signo y Pensamiento*, Vol. XIX -2000

excluded from that process. It was important, then, to favour the development of growth - at least in the Church - with a combination of compatibility and solidarity.

So, with the «Communio et progressio» in hand, a lot of faith and a great deal of patience, RIIAL took its first steps. Those did not consist of supplying hardware, but in searching for bishops interested in using computers and ready to begin a “pilot phase”. The next step was training: a high-level course left the Church with some reliable and highly qualified people. There was no lack of perplexed voices calling it an inadequate project for a poor continent. Time has shown that a poor continent has in fact particularly benefited from this process.

«Made to Measure» technical Solutions

The only way RIIAL could achieve its objective (to be an instrument for communication and communion) was by ensuring that services were within reach not only of the urban centres endowed with other means, but also and mainly of communities in need. A lot of enthusiasm and creativity was necessary to find solutions which allowed contents and services to reach remote priests, and the most distant pastoral agents and parishes.

In 1994, in Argentina, the first “Diocesan communication model” was developed. It functioned even before the Internet. Through a phone line and with a simple computer programmed as a mail server, the bishop’s office and parishes - one of them as far away as 200 km. - could send and receive documents, letters and messages. Peru began introducing computers in a diocese in the Amazon jungle, with no telephone lines or electric power. Computers were linked, battery powered, through a “radio-bridge” and they began exchanging messages.

Three social and religious aspects were being harmonised: faith, culture and technology. The initial intuition of RIIAL has not been modified, although during the past five years the fast technological changes have brought about a quick adaptation. In many aspects - but not in all of them - innovations have made work easier. But in our days technology means choice. That is why starting RIIAL in a diocese means considering concrete needs and pastoral objectives over fascination for «the latest» - analysing technological resources available in each place, making a connection with human, social, economic and cultural aspects. It is possible, then, to choose the most appropriate solution: a “*made to measure*” one. It requires a discernment and a work of synthesis, and also intensive training and educational support for technicians.

On-line, off-line

The use of Internet is now widely extended in Latin America particularly in big cities but also in many small towns. It is an invaluable tool for international communication and the number of Church web-sites is growing every day. To keep in touch with this huge phenomenon, RIIAL has created a useful and performing Observation Service over the Internet. Nevertheless, **on-line technology** cannot be considered as the only broadcasting means for documents and messages. An unequal infrastructure of telecommunications along the continent, high phone charges in many countries and frequently modest and old hardware mean that the Internet cannot be used as the only solution by the Church in Latin America. We need to search for concrete solutions in each case, in particular for those who need it the most. That is why RIIAL uses **off-line technology**. That means using e-mail and putting messages in simple formats

and programmes, which guarantee arrival with every kind of computer. We also use diskettes and CDs to distribute content and for off-line work. In a certain way, this means «going at the speed of the one at the end of the line» without neglecting those richer in technology resources.

During the past years the number of members has increased. Most of the Bishops' Conferences of Latin America and also dioceses, Church institutions, press agencies, seminaries and others belong. Bishops' Conferences from Spain, Italy and Portugal are involved in this project and they contribute with their own reflections, resources and people. The United States have always been represented at RIIAL's continental meetings.

A growing quantity and quality of documents and contents are available through the Net. Church teaching documents in Spanish are available immediately after publication; Pastoral letters and news from the different local Churches are distributed and radio programmes in audio files (Vatican Radio and others), publications, data, mailing, messages and spiritual advice.

Responding to an increasingly complex reality, RIIAL now organises its work and meetings in three groups: *technicians* (monitoring all aspects of systems, solutions, software, etc.), *content* (news agencies, document banks, specialised bulletins, radio and TV files) and *analysis* (study and research on the Latin American reality, digital age and evangelisation).

Church in Action

A Church Computer Network is not only a group of computers in ecclesiastical offices or the Church web-sites on the Internet. An ecclesial net is, let us say, *the Church in action* in this new culture, including the multiple faces of the Church and her many diverse ways of expressing the one and same message for the world. To help do so, the computer network of the Church in Latin America offers the following services meanwhile:

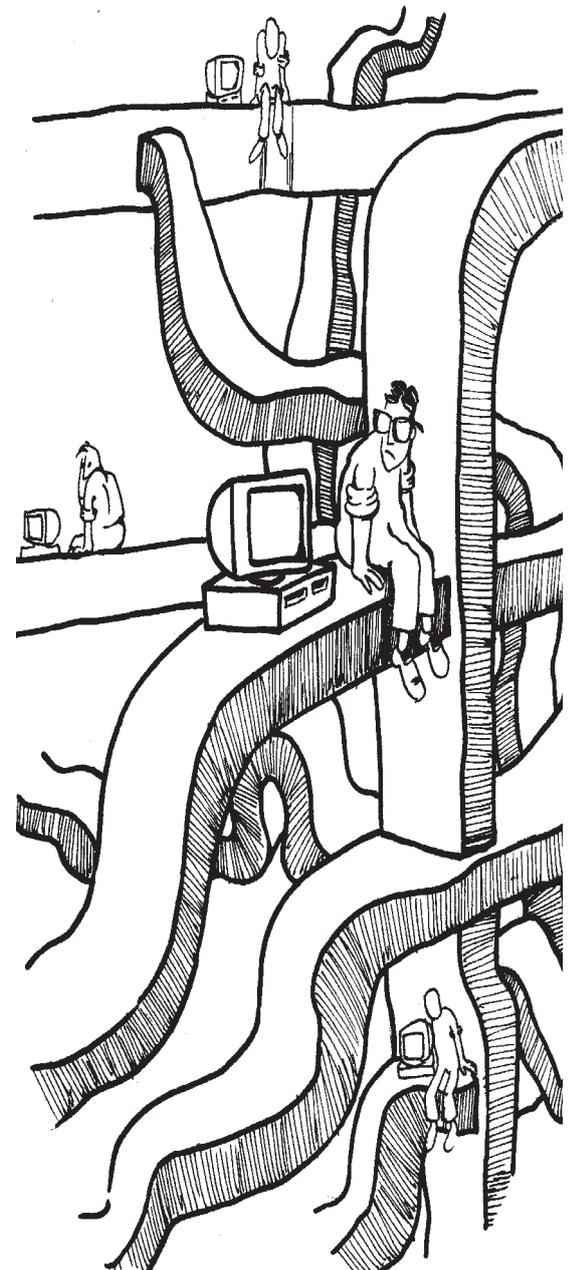
Communication: Encouraging communication at every level, RIIAL has motivated a great movement of "*multiplying e-Mail addresses throughout the Church in the continent*". This is a task to be done by each diocese, to make communication easier between the bishops and the parishes, religious congregations, lay peoples' associations, schools, universities, etc.

Document Banks: RIIAL has encouraged local Churches to make their documents available in digital format, allowing their diffusion and study through the Internet as well as publishing them in diskettes or by e-Mail. So that these documents reach many different people.

Information: There are many different news agencies which offer their Church information in the RIIAL context, some of them particularly accepted by bishops, as Zenit is. As well as the mentioned Observation Service over the Internet and other specialised digital publications.

Databases: Databases of entities and persons in digital formats allow constant updating and easier access. Many programmes (software) made in particular for the Church have been created by RIIAL's technicians for a free continental distribution.

Web-sites: A presence on the Internet enhances a dialogue between faith and culture in the so-called «cyberspace». Creativity, beauty and interactivity must be increasingly present in our web-sites. RIIAL has studied this matter and has offered some practical guidelines for the creation of Church web-sites.



Source: Chasqui No. 68, Dic. 1999

Meetings: Even in the “digital age” there is no substitute for personal dialogue. Reunions allow people to share their own achievements, to meet other pastoral agents of the same field, to learn the real needs of the users, to plan common services. It can also encourage an exchange of reflections on the impact of these changes in the people and culture they are serving.

Training: One of the keys of RIAL are the technicians, whose spirit goes far beyond technical items. They feel that they are apostles in a new field. All through the years, RIAL has promoted a complete training and formation not only in technical areas but also in humanity and spirituality.

We all agree on the necessity of deep reflection on the new situation of the world, from the point of view of communication and enlightened by the Gospel. One of the biggest challenges to face now seems to be the new languages in which this culture expresses itself. The Church has a large corpus of thought and doctrine. As the Church has, in other historical moments, expressed those contents in religious images, buildings, songs, theatre, radio, etc., we now have to learn the multimedia languages of the digital culture.

Recently the Holy Father wrote a letter to the artists encouraging them to be creative in expressing beauty and Good News. The question is: Will the Church be able to make a synthesis between Gospel, art and technology? It is our task to help the Church to do so.

RED LATINOAMERICANA DE GERONTOLOGIA

<http://www.gerontologia.org>

La Red Latinoamericana de Gerontología (RLG) fue establecida en junio del año pasado con el fin de crear un foro de discusión y una fuente de información e inspiración para la labor en pro de la mejora de la calidad de vida de los adultos mayores de América Latina, utilizando los más modernos medios de comunicación. Surge en el marco del Programa de Promoción Pro Bienestar del Adulto Mayor de la Cáritas Alemana en su cooperación con los diferentes miembros de la Red Cáritas en América Latina y en el Caribe para facilitar el intercambio entre las Cáritas hermanas, instituciones amigas, profesionales y voluntarios interesados en la materia.

El primer paso fue la creación del Site <http://www.gerontologia.org>. En su estructura, hasta el momento, tiene: Editorial, Capacitación, Documentos, Eventos, Experiencias, Noticias y Foro de Discusión. Cuenta con aprox. 2400 visitantes hasta agosto del 2000. Está diseñado para que sea un Site dinámico, permanentemente actualizado, favoreciendo de esta manera la divulgación de información relativa al tema, permitiendo el intercambio directo de información y la discusión de temas afines, fomentando la colaboración por parte de los visitantes.

La RLG se encuentra todavía en etapa inicial con la perspectiva de consolidar e incrementar la participación y los esfuerzos para alcanzar los objetivos propuestos. Invita a todos los interesados a participar y a expresarse por este medio con las experiencias, documentos, trabajos científicos, publicaciones, debate, etc. que tienen en sus manos. Para contactar la red, puede dirigirse a su coordinadora Lila Bezrukov (Cáritas Uruguay), lilabezrukov@gerontologia.org

Teología en el Internet

Servicios Koinonía y su revista RELaT

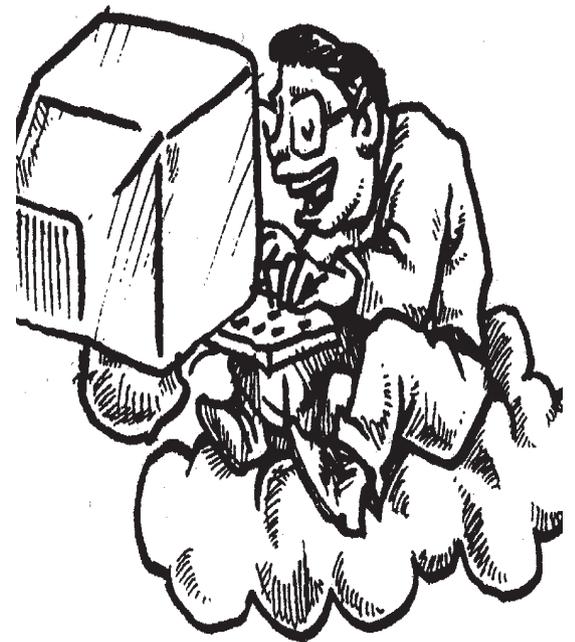
por José María Vigil

Origen e historia

Servicios Koinonía (SK) nació en pascua de 1993, en Managua. Yo me había inscrito al servicio de correo-e a finales de 1992 en la red APC, el nodo Nicarao, que fue una de las primeras presencias de internet en América Latina, gracias a la iniciativa de APC desde el IGC (Institut for Global Communications) de San Francisco, EEUU, dentro del marco de la solidaridad de EEUU con Nicaragua. La comunicación de Nicaragua a internet era a través de IGC y sólo en forma de intercambios periódicos mediante llamada telefónica convencional internacional. Las “conferencias” de APC (una forma peculiar de “news groups” en APC, de acceso sólo a los asociados) fueron las que me dieron la idea: ¿por qué no abrir una conferencia de teología y otra que fuera un servicio de comentarios bíblicos a la liturgia dominical? Conté con el apoyo del nodo Nicarao, y en muy pocos días estaba el servicio al aire la “Revista Electrónica Latinoamericana de Teología” (RELaT) y el Servicio Bíblico, que fueron desde el primer momento las dos columnas, el corazón de los Servicios Koinonía. Y fueron -como nos cuidamos de verificar cuidadosamente ya en aquel momento- la primera Revista de Teología y el primer Servicio Bíblico en internet.

En febrero de 1994 se estableció en Nicaragua por primera vez la conexión continua a internet. La UNI (Universidad Nacional de Ingeniería) fue la experiencia piloto. El “gopher” era la nueva onda, la nueva tecnología en la que estaban entrando todas las universidades, y allí acogieron muy entusiastas la instalación de la RELaT y el Servicio Bíblico. A diferencia de las “conferencias” de APC, el gopher tenía la ventaja de ser ya abierto universalmente, disponible en línea permanentemente desde todo el mundo; por eso, sentí que el paso a la tecnología del Gopher era obligado.

A los pocos meses comenzamos a escuchar hablar del programa Mosaic, del hipertexto, de la WWW. Debí ser en 1995 cuando vimos por primera vez el programa Netscape, y quedamos aturdidos al ver el nuevo mundo de posibilidades que ofrecía aquella interface. Ocultaría un detalle curioso si no dijera que nuestra primera reacción a la WWW fue negativa. Nos pareció que aquel derroche de color, de gráficos... eran también un “derroche” propio del primer mundo, y que era un abuso por su parte, ya que colapsaría las redes de comunicación de los países pobres, cuando en aquel momento, todavía nos manejábamos con módems de 2400 baudios/segundo. Casi nos juramentamos en no utilizar la WWW y continuar con nuestro pero aun en esos casos, los lectores muchas veces se explayan y aprovechan para felicitar, para animar... Un aspecto que hemos cuidado mucho ha sido el de “responder siempre” a las



Source: Südostasien Jg. 16, Nr.2, 2000

comunicaciones -de cualquier tipo que fueran- de los lectores. El resultado ha sido que notamos en los lectores un sentido como de familia, creciente a lo largo de los años. Sentimos muy claramente que nuestros lectores no son simples “usuarios”, sino que son personas “adherentes”, que vibran con el mismo espíritu, que sienten a Koinonía como un ámbito en el que se sienten a gusto, en casa, y que están orgullosos de ella. Los mensajes de agradecimiento, felicitación y ánimo no fallan. Suponemos que tiene que haber personas que no les guste Koinonía, pero la verdad es que no recibimos nunca mensajes negativos.

En cuanto al perfil *numérico*. . . Lamentablemente, no tenemos tantas visitas como tienen los portales de entretenimientos o las páginas de pornografía, pero creemos modestamente que en nuestro género somos uno de los portales más visitados. La gráfica de la frecuencia de las visitas no es, ciertamente, lineal, sino bastante parabólica o exponencial. La experiencia se repite en los últimos años: en el último año transcurrido recibimos más visitas que en los cuatro o cinco anteriores. También nos llegan bastantes mensajes de agradecimiento, mensajes que nos “pagan” con una satisfacción que no podría darnos el mejor de los salarios. Cuando escribo estas líneas estamos a punto de cruzar la línea de las 150.000 visitas en la página principal, calculando que serán cuatro veces más las visitas reales, tanto porque el contador fue puesto bastante tarde, como porque son muchos los usuarios que se conectan directamente a las páginas de cada servicio específico, sin pasar por el “portal”. El promedio de visitas diario en el portal es de 150, y el récord fue de 325 visitas en un día, también “sólo en el portal”.

En cuanto a *reacciones* dentro del mundo mismo de la red diríamos que no hemos podido guardar registro de las muchas páginas que tienen enlazados nuestros Servicios: son muchas. También hemos sido galardonados con el Premio de la Archidiócesis de la Internet, y hemos sido seleccionados por el Grupo Profeta, italiano, y alguna Universidad nos ha seleccionado para la sección de sus páginas recomendadas. . .

Financiación: trabajo voluntario y servicio gratuito

Servicios Koinonía (SK) tiene la gratuidad y la voluntariedad en la misma entraña de su origen. De hecho, en reuniones de trabajo de centros de teología latinoamericanos varias veces lancé la idea de crear un buzón electrónico donde todos los que escribimos teología “para que se lea”, sin poner por delante la recepción de derechos (económicos) de autor, pudiéramos enviar nuestros textos, para que de aquél buzón los tomase quien quisiese y los pudiese publicar gratuitamente sin pagar derechos. Aquél buzón sería para “compartir”, una “comunidad de bienes”, una “Koinonía”. SK nació pues para dar cuerpo a aquella propuesta de compartir gratuita y libremente la producción teológica continental.

La gratuidad, y por tanto el trabajo voluntario, están en el origen mismo de SK. En sus más de siete años de existencia SK se ha mantenido siempre con trabajo voluntario, excepto durante 12 meses, en que una agencia nos proporcionó una ayuda módica (US\$ 250/mes) para que un técnico ayudara al manejo y a la mejora de presentación externa de Koinonía. Fuera de esa excepción, SK ha sido siempre gratuita y voluntaria, sin ningunos ingresos. Actualmente estamos tres personas simplemente detrás de esos casi dos mil archivos o documentos que constituyen el acervo en línea de Koinonía.

¿Cómo enjuga sus gastos, que por otra parte son inevitables, tanto en hardware como en software?

Es sostenida por la “Agenda Latinoamericana” (que al fin y al cabo es un simple libro, no una institución), cuyos autores han renunciado a sus derechos de autor para encaminarlos a esta obra de servicio. En el fondo, la experiencia me ha convencido de que el afán quijotesco de entrar por este camino desnudos de “proyectos” y de apoyos económicos institucionales nos ha hecho mucho más efectivos y ágiles. Si SK lo hubiese concebido e implementado una “institución”, un centro pastoral de servicios... es seguro que su presupuesto hubiera sido costosísimo y su eficacia mucho más lenta y disminuida.

Toda la información en línea necesaria sobre los Servicios Koinonía está en:

<http://servicioskoinonia.org/informacion>

La página original, el portal principal, es: <http://servicioskoinonia.org>

Pero, dependiendo del lugar geográfico donde se esté, puede obtenerse mejor conexión en nuestro espejos de Europa (servicioskoinonia.net) o de Centroamérica (www.uca.edu.ni/koinonia). Pruebe usted mismo.

Algunos ejemplos de las secciones:

1) **Revista Electrónica Latinoamericana de Teología (RELaT)**

<http://servicioskoinonia.org/relat>

2) **Servicio Bíblico Latinoamericano**

<http://servicioskoinonia.org/biblico>

En textos de frecuencia semanal, ofrece un comentario bíblico-teológico de unas 800 palabras a las lecturas bíblicas del domingo, y un comentario más breve de unas 300 palabras a las de los demás días, para la celebración comunitaria, la meditación personal y/o la predicación. El texto es original y está redactado por biblistas y teólogos latinoamericanos, pudiendo ser distribuido o reproducido libremente, dando el crédito correspondiente. De su página puede pasar al Centro Bíblico Virtual, con su sección bíblica de la biblioteca, su consultorio, el calendario litúrgico anual... En la sección bíblica de la biblioteca se deposita quincenalmente un nuevo folleto bíblico de los grandes biblistas latinoamericanos, que puede ser recogido gratuitamente. Hay traducciones de este servicio Bíblico:

en portugués: http://www.claretianos.com.br/port/frame_servb.htm

en inglés: www.cmf.br/servbib/

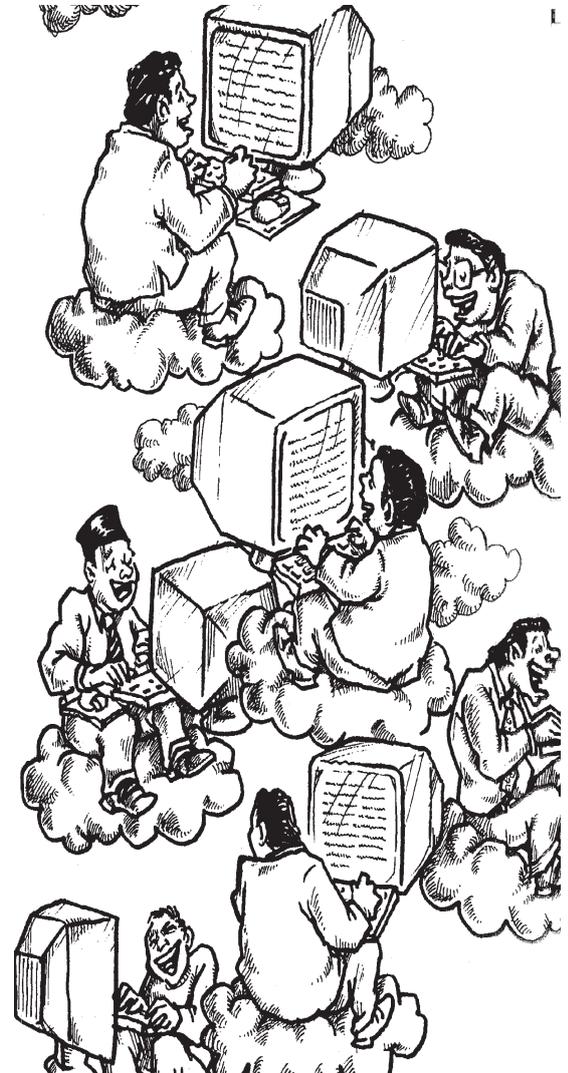
en italiano: www.peacelink.it/users/romero/parola.htm

Los comentarios bíblicos semanales pueden ser recibidos por correo-e, cada semana, gratuitamente, sin necesidad de copiar de la página en la Red. Para ello basta suscribirse al servidor de lista (vea luego „servidores de lista“).

3) **LOGOS**

<http://servicioskoinonia.org/logos>

Es una base de datos documental destinada a los medios de comunicación social, desde los pequeños boletines populares hasta los grandes rotativos. En LOGOS encontrarán artículos



Source: Südstasien Jg.16, Nr2, 2000

breves, de perfil periodístico, comentarios de opinión de firmas latinoamericanas acreditadas, materiales populares...

4) **Martirologio Latinoamericano**

<http://servicioskoinonia.org/martirologio>

Para consultar qué mártires celebramos cada día y leer/copiar pequeñas reseñas biográficas suyas, para consultar las Jornadas y efemérides afroindolatinoamericanas, o las „Jornadas de la Patria Grande“, de Eduardo Galeano.

5) **La página de Monseñor Romero**

<http://servicioskoinonia.org/romero>

Tiene también las homilias que Mons. Romero predicó sobre textos bíblicos iguales a los que hoy nosotros escuchamos, en:

<http://servicioskoinonia.org/romero/homilias/indice.htm>

6) **La Página de Pedro Casaldáliga**

<http://servicioskoinonia.org/pedro>

Sus artículos, poesía, cartas circulares, varios libros, el elenco de sus obras completas, no pocas de ellas en línea...

7) **TAMBO**

<http://servicioskoinonia.org/varios/tambo.htm>

Un servidor de lista para compartir libremente nuestra visión de la realidad y nuestra fe desde la perspectiva latinoamericana: análisis, diálogos entre los participantes y campañas información.

8) **La Comunidad Cristiana Virtual, CCV, o „Parroquia Virtual“,**

es una iniciativa hermana, que recomendamos encarecidamente para todos los que, por no tener el Ciberespacio, o también para aquellos que teniendo ya su comunidad „física“, quieran enriquecerla con la experiencia de esta comunidad virtual. Vean:

<http://comunidad.cristiana.virtual.cl>

o directamente desde nuestro portal

9) **La Pagina de Cerezo Barredo**

<http://servicioskoinonia.org/cerezo>

El dibujo de cada domingo, y otros

Para contactarnos:

-sobre contenidos: koinonia@servicioskoinonia.org

-información, suscripciones: contacto@servicioskoinonia.org

-para el servicio bíblico: contacto@biblico.org

-Agenda Latinoamericana: agenda@latinoamericana.org

Church lacks Connection

Africa's Access to new Information and Communication Technology is 'under Construction'

By Michel Philippart, CAMECO Africa Desk

Some Facts

It is evident that Africa is still far from being like the rest of the world in many aspects, including media and communications and in particular in the field of new information and communication technologies (NICT). As we can easily presume, Africa has the lowest rate of Internet users, host sites and Internet Service Providers, but at the same time Africa currently shows the highest growth rate in the world. One has even started to talk about „e-business“ in Africa!...

- Internet users (according to Mike Jensen²), the current estimates put the number of Internet users in Africa as of April 1999 at 927,985, of which 800,000 can be found in South Africa. This is in fact a tremendous growth rate of 83% in comparison to the 1997 figures! And this rapid development is still continuing...

- Host sites: in July 1998, Africa had about 148,436 Internet host sites (140,577 of these were in South Africa) and a growth rate of 14,7% compared to 1997 (if we don't consider South Africa, the comparison shows an increase rate of 31% for the same period)

- Providers: according to Mike Jensen, there were almost 400 Internet Service Providers (ISP) in the region by late 1998, or 300 ISPs excluding South Africa, and most of the countries in the continent, with the exception of 14 countries, had more than one ISP.²

Despite the growth in Internet connectivity in Africa, Internet services remained confined to capital cities, and only in some countries are the services extended to major secondary towns. Unless there is a move to extend Internet connectivity in the rural areas, the rural population will be maintained in a „new“ marginalisation : this section of the population which accounts for 70 - 80 % of the total population of the continent, will remain cut off from the development of the NICT.

Of course Internet and the NICT require the availability of

- electricity or energy supply (solar...): after a first contact and a very general knowledge on Africa, we could be well-aware that many African people don't depend on a satisfactory supply yet. Power failures are a daily experience even in the major cities in Africa, like for instance actually and for months in Nairobi or Addis Ababa.

- specific accessories: special conditions are required to cope with dust and heat, making the price of the required equipment for Internet access higher than in European countries (stabiliser, air-conditioning, generator,...);

■ telephone lines or telecommunications means (satellite, etc.). According to statistics produced by International Telecommunication Union (ITU report 1998), Africa, with 12% of the world's population, has only 2% of the global telephone network, with a very low density coverage of less than 2 lines per 1,000 inhabitants on average (compared with 48 in Asia, 280 in America, 314 in Europe - East and West - and 520 in the European Community countries). Furthermore the telephone costs are higher in Africa than in the rest of the world...

■ computers: the price of computers is more expensive in most of the African countries than in our European countries. Furthermore in the African context, some additional accessories are required, like a stabiliser; therefore this product is not affordable to the standard living conditions of the majority of the Africans; for many of them the price of a „grand public“ computer (US\$ 1,000) exceeds the annual income.³

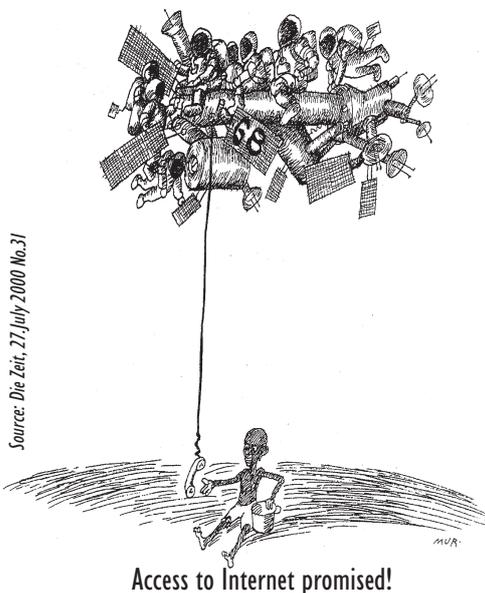
■ Finally Internet requires good knowledge in writing and reading... And the literacy rate in Africa remains low!

Of course, we could continue to mention and analyse constraints against the development of Internet use by the majority of the African population, making it available and accessible only to the richest section of the population. However I believe - and there are some signs in this respect - that Africa will find - and it is a current process - its own way to deal with and take advantage of Internet. Just to mention a few examples : to solve literacy problems, „modern public writers“ - Internet mediators - appear in or next to „Téléboutiques“ or „Cyber Cafés“: either they „write“ for the people or they teach to arouse interest in the use of new technologies, using it for the people or training the ones more interested. Another example is the setting up of rural - but also urban - „telecentres“ which offer community access to telephone, fax and Internet...

Where is the Church of Africa in the Internet World?

Who in the Church is using Internet? Who has Internet connection ? And for which kind of use? Is the African Church not losing a great opportunity for communication? Recently I have been „provoked“ by the Director of the „Centre Catholique pour l'Unesco“ in Paris with those questions. My answer was : „We, CAMECO, could communicate via Internet (Email) with at least one person or one Church institution in each of the African countries“. This is something, isn't it?

It is true that more and more Church communication ventures and centres in Africa have an Email address : radio stations, audio-visual productions units, printing presses, newspapers, communications offices at regional, national and sometimes diocesan level...; but only a few dioceses : according to the „Email directory of Africa“ managed by an African fellow from Rome⁴ , excluding South Africa, only 40 dioceses in Africa have one, which is less than 8%. Email service is a first step, in the sense that it simplifies the circulation of communication and contacts, and speeds the flow and circulation of information. For instance, this development supports the improvement of the Church News and Features Services („Documentation and Informations Africaines“ in Kinshasa; „Africanews“, „New People Features Service“ or „AANA/APTA“ in Nairobi...); or some regional and national offices start to distribute their newsletters via Email (AMECEA Secretariat for instance, or the Sudan Episcopal Conference offering a „monitored news from the Arabic press“...).



Access to Internet promised!

Internet Homepage for Church institutions : A few dioceses and Episcopal conferences now have their own homepages: Tanzania, Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, Cape Town archdiocese, Zambia, Niger, Cotonou in Benin, La Vie Catholique of Mauritius and Zimbabwe. However, a visit shows problems : updating of information, speed for down loading which can be dispiriting, lack of interactivity,... The Internet presence of the African Church and Church groups needs reflection as well as professional competence in particular in Webpage design and maintenance.

In this respect, and it is valid for many other aspects of the Church communication apostolate and involvement, I wonder where the „communication officers“ of the Church are at panafrican level, as well as at regional and national level: are they reflecting on this issue? The question is not only about the hardware and the - financial - capacities for being equipped and connected to Internet or Church Intranet, but more fundamental in the content aspect. There is definitely an urgent need to work out some „clear ideas“ and visions about the impact of the NICT on the African society and the Church in Africa, and about how the African Church wants to use them and be present in that Information World.

¹ Cf. compte-rendu de l'atelier „commerce électronique“ lors de la conférence „Bamako 2000: Les passerelles du développement“ sur le site „Africa'nti“ du CNRS de l'Université de Bordeaux (Annie Chéneau-Loquay) : www.africa.u-bordeaux.fr/africanti/resultats/bko2000.htm

² Mike Jensen constantly updates information about Internet in Africa, globally and by country. His address : <http://demiurge.wn.apc.org/africa/partial.html>

³ Just to give a point of comparison, according to a recent report of Reporters Sans Frontières on the Press Freedom in Ethiopia, and in July I could check and confirm those figures by myself, the monthly income of the journalists in that country is between 500 and 1000 birrs which is equivalent to 60 to 120 US\$; so in that case, how could Ethiopian journalists have their own PC, although this is a daily necessity for them! According to Annie Chéneau-Loquay in Benin, the equipment needed for access to Internet (computer, modem, telephone) costs about FCFA 1,800,000.00 (FF 18,000.00 or Euro 2,750.00), in other words 9 years' salary for the average Beninese citizen; operating a mailbox costs the operator FCFA 12,000 per month while the average monthly income is about FCFA 16,000!

⁴ compiled by J. Mutiso-Mbinda, <http://www.rc.net/catholicafrica>

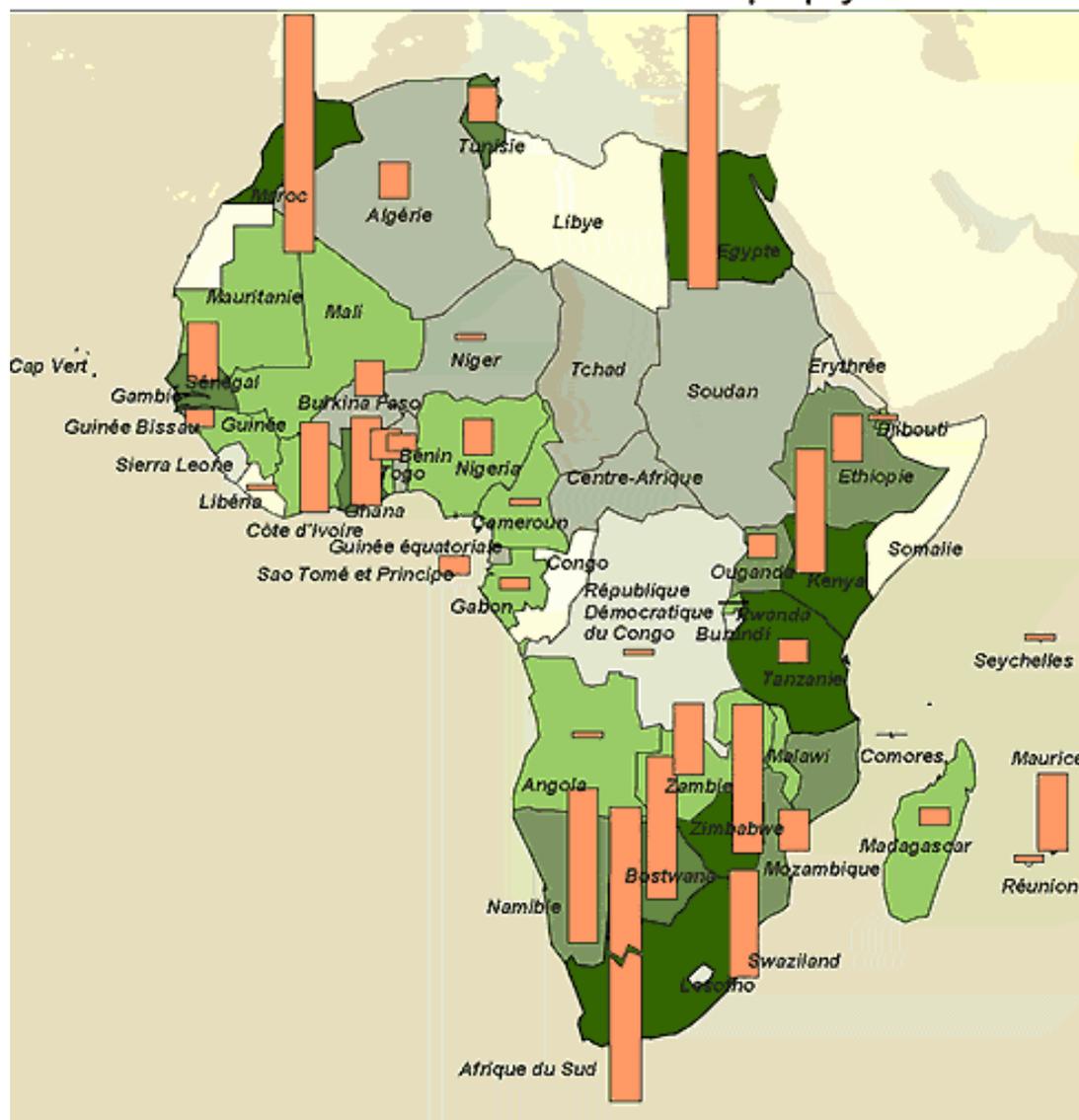
BOOK-REVIEWS — RECENSIONS — RESEÑAS

Annie Chéneau-Loquay, “Les enjeux des technologies de la communication en Afrique: du téléphone à Internet”, Editions Karthala - Regards, 2000, 406 pages, avec le Cédérom “Internet au Sud” édité par Pascal Renaud.

Cet ouvrage propose une analyse de la question des technologies de l'information et de la communication en Afrique par une vingtaine de spécialistes de disciplines différentes — sociologues, économistes, informaticiens, géographes, historiens, politologues — qui, chacun de son point de vue souligne les enjeux des NTIC pour le développement. La matière de ce livre a d'abord donné lieu à un site web, “Africa'nti” (www.regards.cnrs.fr/africanti), qui a offert ainsi une première version des lieux géographiques et de la nouvelle donne liée au déploiement des réseaux électroniques en Afrique. Les écrits regroupés à présent dans la forme papier ont été pour la plupart remaniés, à la fois pour tenir compte de l'évolution de la société de l'information en Afrique et pour être adaptés aux exigences d'un ouvrage de référence.

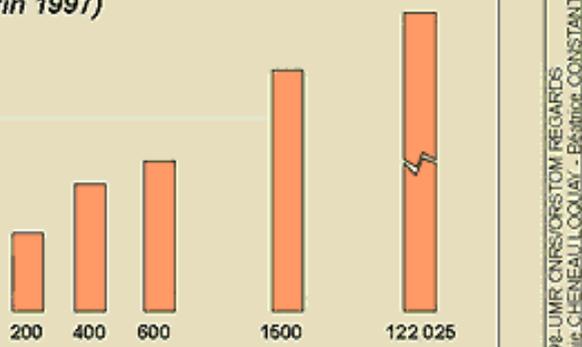
Internet : le réseau africain en mars 1998

accès internationaux et nombre d'utilisateurs par pays



1. Accès nationaux à Internet (1998)

2. Nombre de sites Internet par pays (fin 1997)



Sources : Mike JENSEN, 1998 et Indicateurs des télécommunications africaines, U.I.T. 1998

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Auteur: CHENEAU LOUÏS - Révisé: CONSTANTY

Télé Centres

Une appropriation collective des NTIC en Afrique

Michel Philippart, CAMECO¹

Le journaliste étranger de passage à Cotonou (Bénin) et à Lomé (Togo) qui cherche une connexion internet pour envoyer un article à sa rédaction fera une expérience très concrète de la disparité de l'implantation des nouvelles technologies de la communication entre les pays africains : à Cotonou, cela revient à chercher une aiguille dans une botte de foin, et la plupart des passants vous regarderont comme un extra-terrestre si vous leur demandez où trouver un „Cybercafé“, alors que vous en trouverez partout à Lomé...

En 1999, en excluant l'Afrique du Sud, un Africain sur 9000 avait accès à Internet, alors que la moyenne mondiale est de une personne sur 40. Tous les pays africains sont quand même reliés au réseau des réseaux et le nombre de fournisseurs de service Internet augmente rapidement. Mais comment offrir au paysan illettré ou à ses enfants, l'accès à cette „encyclopédie mondiale“ ? Comment emmener des millions de communautés marginalisées à l'ère de la communication ?

L'obstacle n'est plus d'ordre technique. „La solution, ce ne sera pas le modèle 'une personne, un téléphone'. Ce sera plutôt le modèle du centre de services“.

„Notre objectif“, dit Grant Thomas membre de ACACIA², „n'est pas d'équiper chaque foyer africain d'un téléphone ou d'un ordinateur. Nous allons plutôt évaluer la faisabilité de centres de services situés à moins d'une heure de marche.“

Depuis longtemps, dans les pays en développement, les propriétaires de téléviseurs, de radios et de téléphones partagent avec les voisins. Aujourd'hui, les télé centres poussent comme des champignons. „Ils ont fleuri un peu partout, dit Gaston Zongo, directeur d'ACACIA. Uniquement au Sénégal nous en avons recensé plus de 9.000. Ce qui a donné de l'emploi à une vingtaine de milliers de personnes en cinq ans. Dans Dakar, la capitale du Sénégal, continue-t-il, 90 % des gens qui n'ont pas le téléphone peuvent désormais recevoir des appels; les petits messagers des télé centres vont leur apporter les messages ou leur dire qu'ils doivent retourner un appel. Ceci permet aux petits commerçants d'avoir un numéro de téléphone, une adresse électronique, bref tout ce qu'il faut pour une véritable carte d'affaires !“

Puisque la clientèle n'a, la plupart du temps, qu'une maîtrise minimale des ordinateurs ou des appareils de communication, le télé centre communautaire se distingue aussi en offrant l'aide de ses assistants, le plus souvent des jeunes. Ces assistants et assistantes de télé centre communautaire évaluent les besoins des clients, les aident à utiliser l'équipement et les guident vers les sources d'information : ONG, services publics, banques de données commerciales, etc. Ce sont les nouveaux écrivains publics du quartier ou du village. De tels établissements offrent aussi habituellement de la formation, par exemple en conception de pages WEB ainsi que des services de bureautique, photocopie et dactylographie, et parfois restauration et buvette. Ils louent aussi leurs services aux entreprises locales pour lesquelles leur personnel conçoit des



Source: Südostasien, Jg.16, No. 2, 2000

pages WEB, accessibles au monde entier à partir du serveur du télé centre. Dans les pays en développement, tout comme dans les pays développés, les télé centres prennent diverses formes : de la cabine téléphonique au cybercafé. Ils peuvent aussi s'amarrer à une école, un hôpital, un centre communautaire, une ONG ou une entreprise. Et pourquoi pas un service d'Eglise ? Dans certains pays, les services diocésains de la communication par exemple pourraient élargir leurs activités dans le sens de „télé centres“ ou „télé boutiques“ offrant aux personnes et organisations de la ville et de la région des possibilités de téléphoner, d'envoyer des fax, mais aussi des courriers électroniques et d'accéder à Internet. On pourrait faire un pas de plus et envisager ces „télé centres diocésains ou paroissiaux“ comme des lieux d'initiation et de formation des habitants, en particulier des jeunes en relation avec les écoles et des enseignants aux NTIC.

¹ D'après un article "L'Internet pour tous, le potentiel des télé centres en Afrique" de Jean-Marc Fleury. Extrait de "Flash du CRDI" (International Development Research Centre, Canada), n° 3, octobre 1999 sur le site : www.idrc.ca/media/TelecentresAfrica_f.html Une version anglaise de cet article est disponible sur le même site.

² ACACIA est le nom d'une initiative internationale dont l'objectif est de mettre les technologies de l'information et de la communication au service du développement social et économique des collectivités locales de l'Afrique subsaharienne.

La Démocratisation de l'accès à la Société de l'Information

« La dimension sociale est un aspect primordial dont il faut tenir compte lors des discussions sur l'entrée de l'Afrique dans la Société de l'Information. La pire des situations serait celle où l'émergence de la Société de l'Information s'accompagnerait de la création d'une élite de l'information et du savoir dans le continent. En effet, l'un des plus grands avantages de ces technologies qui abolissent quasiment les facteurs espace et temps, réside dans leur capacité à atteindre ceux qui étaient oubliés jusque là des circuits d'information. De nombreux outils sont aujourd'hui disponibles, qui peuvent permettre la démocratisation de l'accès, tels que l'utilisation des technologies de l'information et des communications dans des projets de télé-médecine, les télé centres (ou centres communautaires) et la télé-formation. Une attention particulière devra être portée aux besoins des femmes et des jeunes, lorsque les utilisateurs seront identifiés. »

Extrait de « La mondialisation et l'ère de l'information : Introduction », document de l'Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), 1999, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Site Internet : <http://www.bellanet.org/partners/aisi/adf99docs/infoagefr.htm>

Internet in Vietnam

Unity of Contrasts: New and old Culture go along

By Prof. Jörg Becker*

Ho-Chi- Minh-Paths in a Sea of Data

Vietnam wants to know about it: the country that sees itself as the “Dragon”, would now like to belong to the tiger states, finally get rich, and forget their war wounds. The Internet is to be a great help in the fulfilling of these dreams. Today, the Vietnamese have more freedom in the World Wide Web than in everyday life.

A legend tells of a sacred tortoise which lived in the centre of Hanoi’s Ho Hoan Kiem (“The lake of the returned sword”). During the struggle against the Chinese Ming occupying forces (1418-1428), it is said that it presented King Le Thai To with a magical sword for his support. The king went to the middle of the Ho Hoan Kiem in a small boat, and returned the sword after his victory. The tortoise snatched it from him and disappeared under the water. The king named the tortoise the guarding spirit of the lake, and a pagoda, three storeys high, was erected after a time, on a small island in the middle of the lake, in honour of the animal.

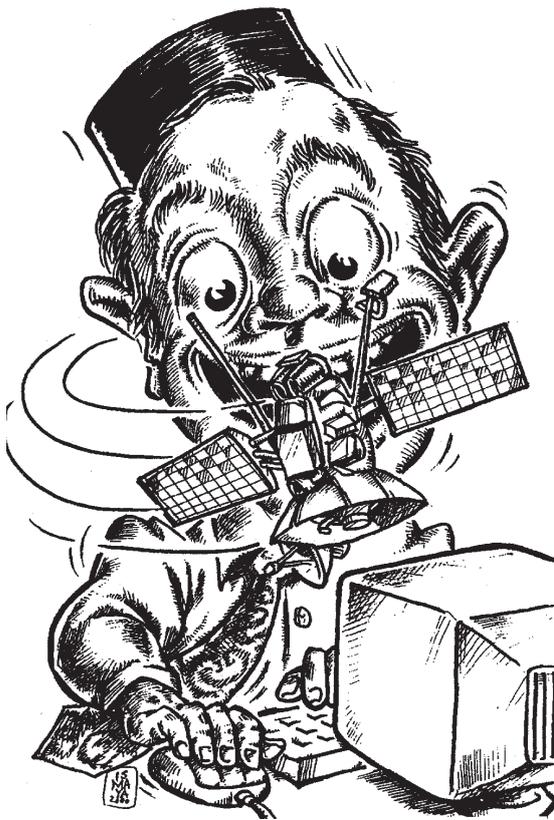
It is also said that if the tortoise ever appears again, something meaningful would happen in Vietnam. The story goes that the golden animal was seen twice in the last few years. It appeared the first time in 1986, as Nguyen Van Linh, the general secretary of the communist party at the time, agreed upon the politics of “doi moi”, a kind of Vietnamese Perestroika and Glasnost politic. Doi moi means renewal and is a “fundamental revolution in all spheres of social life”. The second time the tortoise appeared in the lake was on November 19th 1997, when Vietnam officially connected to the Internet.

Doi moi, innovation, dynamism, Vietnam as the fifth Asian Tiger country: These are not just pious words and glossy brochures. It is also reality. The yearly average income of a Vietnamese has risen 5% annually in the last ten years, the inflation rate has dropped in these 10 years from 20% to only 4% in 1997, and industrial growth is extremely rapid.

The Vietnamese Internet policy has to be looked at in the light of this background. Vu Dinh Cu, Vice-Parliament President, Chairman of the Technology Committee in the national parliament and, that goes without saying, still a dedicated Marxist, comments objectively:

“We have given all information technology the highest priority, that Vietnam may take part in global changes. Our youth will be a youth of information technology. Software, telecommunication, and networking belong to this concept. Internet must be extended for the good of the Vietnamese people”.

** Politics and Communications Academic, Managing Director of the KomTech Institute for Communication and Technology Research, Solingen, Germany*



Source: Südostasien Jg.16, No.2, 2000

“In fact, you have censorship”

“If fact, you have press censorship. So how can you have Internet at all?” My interlocutor from the Technical University in Hanoi looked at me earnestly. His expression said both yes and no. “We don’t want cyber pornography, or a culture of violence, nor prostitution or call-girls, we don’t need asocial sects, Mafia, information pollution, or the escalation of individual hedonistic freedom”. The Internet in Vietnam is first and only an instrument to advance industry, to achieve participation in the global market, and with the possibilities of exchanging scientific, technical and economic information. Now my conversation partner looked at me mischievously and referred to the difference between the law and reality. When the novel the “Sorrow of War” was published by Bao Ninh at the beginning of the nineties, it was soon banned. The portrayal of the psychological traumas of Vietnamese war veterans were too realistic for the officials.

Whilst telling me more about the novel, he whistled a street vendor over, pressed 100 Dong into his hand and bought a copy of the “forbidden” novel. Censorship? The older generations of the scientists of nature and technology, trained in the GDR (East Germany), are fluent in German. “Yes, censorship is a problem here, but also in your country. Wasn’t Compuserve dragged to court on a charge of spreading child pornography? And didn’t the German parliament vote in the majority, for the undermining of the prohibition of censorship for the secret services?” A few days before my departure, he pressed a copy of the satirical magazine “Tuoi Tre Cuoi” from Saigon into my hand. The cover showed the official government censors eagerly studying pornography: They were masturbating with pleasure.

Caught between a Cyber Park and Ancestor Worship

The Hanoi Institute of Information Technology (IOIT) is the technical nucleus of the Vietnamese Internet. Scientists there developed an early interest in the American military project ARPANet (Advanced Research Projects Network). They received technical help from the German University of Karlsruhe, this university was the mid-wife of the Chinese Internet: As early as 1987 there was an x.25 Gateway linked to the Chinese Academic Network (CANET).

Besides the two pioneer networks, VARENet and NetNam from the early nineties, the following networks are also very important for the Vietnam of today: Toolnet is the network of the National Scientific and Technological Information Centre, Vinanet is the network of the Department of Commerce, and Vinet offers all Vietnamese laws passed since 1945 in writing. Vinet also provides Vietnam’s Statistical Yearbook in electronic form, and both electronic specialist journals “Thoi Bao Kinh Te” and “Thoi Bao Quoc TE”. The Net Tri Tue Vietnam (TTVN) or “Wisdom from Vietnam” is only two years old. Many users have changed over to TTVN as it offers free access and is user friendly.

Who owns the Vietnamese cyber space? End of 1997, there was a bitter internal political struggle on the question of which of the above mentioned networks should receive state licences for Internet Access Providers. It wasn’t really surprising that only a single company, Vietnam Data Communications (VDC), a subsidiary company of the state-owned Vietnamese Post and Telecommunication Company, received this status.

A short time ago the Japanese helped the Vietnamese with considerable investments in a prestige object. Deep in the jungle, about 40 km west of Hanoi, they started building the Hoa Lac Hi-

Tech Park with a vision and deadline for the forthcoming 25 years. It's director, Professor Dang Ngoc Dinh comments: "The basis of Vietnamese industry and commerce is science and technology. We are striving long term, for own technological capacities. Our information scientists are already as good as those in Bangalore or California, but much cheaper however".

The Hoa Lac Hi-tech Park Project did a recent survey on how 100 early Internet users make use of the Internet. It is about the "early adopter" the innovators and the curious, the extra something. Most are male, over average school achievers, and are for Vietnamese circumstances, better earners. The first Vietnamese users were exactly in character with other "early adopter" colleagues world-wide, be it in Switzerland, USA or China. As the Web is not very well known in Vietnam, PC's are mostly used for sending emails. Nearly all users are the opinion that the Internet fees are too high, and there is an insistent rumour that this "fee wall" is politically desired, however all persons questioned answered that the Internet in Vietnam needs to be extended urgently.

The questionnaire results are particularly fascinating in the areas in which they differ from European ones: Here, the normal culture critic sees the Internet as automatically being the end of traditional culture as we know it, the Vietnamese think differently about this. More than half of all questioned see no contrast between the modern Internet world and the old world of their ancestors. The expansion of the Net is as important to them as the sentence: "We should never forget the wisdom of our ancestors". It is not as it is here - old contra new - but a unity of contrasts, as Lao Tse already taught 2,600 years ago.



When it comes to ethics, the internet has so far had a shady reputation. The Jesuits might just change that. All but four of their 28 universities in the United States have clubbed together to offer cyberspace classes on ethics. Last summer each of them donated US\$ 35,000 to set up the Jesuit Distance Education Network (www.ajcunet.edu/jnet/jnet.htm). Source: The Tablet, 12.8.2000

Online-Forum in Asia

Opportunity for Christian NGO's to join forces

*By David Lin**

Never before has this happened in the last 50 years in the history of Asia. North and South Korea defrosted their hostile confrontation by establishing closer contacts with each other. Their current reconciliation effort, the hot spot in international news, marks the end of the north-south tension. A dream a year ago and for many maybe for a few decades in the past, it's a reality today.

The news of Korean reconciliation brought back many memories to me, not only because I visited North Korea's Panmunjom (where the division of north-south Korea lies) in my former capacity as a church journalist back in 1989. But also because the news is so related to the theme that I am writing about - the use of new technology by Asia Region-WACC (AR-WACC).

AR-WACC's history of using new technology, as far as I can remember as Asia Regional Co-ordinator since 1994, can be traced back to October 1996. The regional association had its triennial assembly in Chiangmai, Thailand. AR-WACC set the theme "The Technology Revolution: Its Challenge to the Asian Communicator" for its pre-assembly seminar.

In the assembly seminar (supported by a grant from the German development agency EZE), I witnessed 60 participants from 11 Asian countries study the use of basic web language HTML (hyper-text markup language) to make homepages, exposed to memory chips and modem on the motherboard of a PC (personal computer), learn desktop publishing, and listen to a panel. The panel focussed on the strength and weakness of using Internet in church mission and development and for women, youth and children.

At that assembly, only six participants had an email address. None at all had a homepage. Naturally, there was a cry from a few participants alerting us to the fact that they lived in places which are backward in infrastructure, without adequate phone lines or phone sets, not to mention a computer set.

Three years later, in the subsequent triennial assembly held in Hong Kong in October 1999, 45 of the 60 participants have email addresses. At least 10 of the organisations they represented have a homepage of their own. They are all corporate or personal members of WACC, from the Philippines, India, Indonesia, Thailand, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Malaysia, Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea and Japan.

The surge in email addresses was noticeable to me because as moderator of the AR-WACC Online Forum on the assembly seminar theme, "Communication for Reconciliation in the Asian Context", I had to register participants' emails. Only upon registration of their emails would

**Regional Coordinator of Asia and Pacific at the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), London. He is originally from Hong Kong, and has 15 years experience as a church journalist.*

they be able to send and receive email submissions by other participants through the exchange facility of the host of the Listserve.

One might ask: what does this enormous leap from six email addresses to 45 within three years' time mean to the Asian Christian communication scene? I think this means that email is no longer a product that belongs to the elite of society. It has become so common that it's available to our WACC members who are grassroot communicators. How should we react to this phenomenon, to this reality of telecommunication? I can quickly say that this includes both opportunities and challenges. Let me talk about the opportunities first.

AR-WACC's Online Forum was made possible by the free service offered by ChurchNet, an NGO based in Seoul, South Korea administered by a WACC corporate member. The location is excellent and within one year South and North Korea started its reconciliation process. I can't help but recall this Korean link in the entire scenario of AR-WACC priority concern on reconciliation and new technology.

Engaging ChurchNet in the team to provide hosting of Listserve would moreover realise my vision of bridging the digital-divide, between those who can afford access to internet and those who cannot, and serving the whole Christian communicator community in Asia.

Listserves at that time was facilitated mainly through emails, however I found that not all Asian WACC members had email despite the surge in the number of users. So I suggested the design of a homepage that allows users (who can't use email but manage to access a homepage) to submit their comments through a form in the homepage via a "Write" button www.churchnet-kr.org/arwacc-forum/discussion.htm, which would in effect transmit the email message to all registered email users in the Listserve.

This dual method of electronic access revolutionised the traditional use of Listserve (only via email) by many NGOs and church agencies at that time, and was used by AR-WACC for the first time.

I also insisted on having at least one moderator for the online discussions because discussions would be disorganised without moderating, lose direction and miss the objectives.

Another traditional way of using Listserve is to leave it open for use without mentioning a deadline date for closing up. This is of course natural for net users, because once you run the Listserve operation, there's no limitation of use at all due to the vast space available in cyberspace.

However, I see it differently. My concept is that we should inform the participants of the time duration for Listserve use. A timeframe will enhance the quality of discussion when participants know the amount of time they have for the discussion of topics. This method eventually proved very efficient, I call it Listserve moderating and management, the idea originated from moderating a meeting in real life.

I started Listserve on September 21st 1999, with a test message and ended on January 31st 2000, after the participants requested an extension on the original closing date of November 31st 1999. This deadline was designed to give a one month post-assembly discussion after the AR-WACC assembly, so that follow-up action could take place after all participants returned to their home countries. However, online participants were enthused by the post-assembly



Source: EPD -Entwicklungspolitik 14/15/ 2000

discussions and requested the continuation of the online forum beyond the end of November deadline for the following reasons:

- a) a fresh discussion on Dalit issues between an online participant who couldn't attend the Hong Kong assembly and a participant who attended the assembly;
- b) exchange of messages on solidarity and support among the online members, particularly on the labour dispute case in the Philippines and the worsening conflict situation in Aceh, Indonesia;
- c) photos of the assembly posted on the homepage stimulated more interest in online discussion, brought back fond memories of fellowship and interaction among members;
- d) last but not least, the approach of Christmas and the New Millennium. Participants felt that the online forum provided a good platform for them to enter into the new era together as a form of reconciliation, solidarity and alliance.

These are some of the welcoming signs of the online forum. But the forum that is embedded with questions pre-designed to guide participants in the discussion is also part of the success. The first question that came to my mind when designing the online forum was how to make the online forum a user-friendly one. To be user-friendly, like a real life meeting, it has to have a clear theme, interesting sub-topics for discussion, a friendly environment as opposed to an over-heated, verbally violent discussion, and the sub-topics will have to be used in small group discussions in the real seminar as a continuation of the online discussion and to allow non-online members to have a chance to discuss the same topics.

With the understanding of the AR-WACC Executive Committee members, especially those who were the preparatory members of the assembly seminar, I uploaded the eight questions under the umbrella theme, "Communication for Reconciliation in the Asian context". They are:

Question 1: On values of human dignity

Question 2: What constitutes "human dignity" based on your faith and in the context of where you come from?

Question 3: On peace

Question 4: On freedom of expression, quality of life, market economy

Question 5: What are the present problems that hamper the equality of resource sharing and freedom of media?

Question 6: On nationalism

Question 7: On your faith and reflection

Question 8: If you are a media worker, how can you help reconcile conflicts and promote peace?

I made a public invitation to all Listserve members to respond to all the questions. I did not of course, expect all the 45 members registered to respond, but my estimation was that as long as there were three or four statements I could use them as chat up points. In fact, I would be in trouble if I had 45 responses because that would be too big a job for one online moderator. At the same time I designed the questions, I also laid out the rules of the online forum discussion. This was one of the delicate parts in the whole exercise. One has to walk between the lines of

freedom of expression and the demand to keep the integrity of the discussion without anyone being hurt by offensive statements. I finally called them “house rules” highlighting standards as well as responsibilities in keeping the forum as a place for the whole community to use. In the end, no rule was violated and I was happy that I didn’t have to use any of the rules at all.

Here are some statistics that might interest you. A total of 178 messages were posted on the online forum between September 21st 1999 and January 31st 2000. Those who submitted their messages came from Pakistan, India, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Hong Kong, South Korea and Japan. The only non-Asian message came from the WACC Global President Albert van den Huevel, from the Netherlands. There were greeting messages from the WACC global officers in Argentina and Australia. Greetings also came from the WACC General Secretary Carlos Valle. These were real boosts to the Asian community’s first ever online effort. I had personal talks with members who did not submit but just read the online messages. They said that although the majority just read the messages, they became an educational bulletin board from which they got ideas for their own work. The homepage counter recorded more than 750 hits (the number of times the online forum homepage was opened by users). The ChurchNet Administrator reported that half of the hits came from Asia and half from non-Asian sources (including homepage addresses registered in USA as <.net> <.org> or <.com> etc. though they might be located in Asia and Pacific and other continents.)

There were a few climaxes in this new media exercise. When Pakistan had the military coup that overthrew the president, I wrote an appeal to all participants on the situation and our Pakistani member received lots of prayer mails. He in turn reported first hand what was happening in the city he lived and worked in. His mail became the most updated information on the media and political situation in Pakistan during the coup crisis.

Our Indonesian members provided penetrating perspectives on the religious (Islam vs. Christianity) and ethnic conflicts (Indonesian vs. ethnic Chinese) in Indonesia and gave a thorough interpretation of the rather complex situation in Asia’s largest Muslim country.

A Korean homepage allowed users to build peace on the internet. This alerted all of us to the conflict on the Korean peninsula, yet there were chances to contribute to peace through the Internet which has no national borders.

The online forum also brought some challenges:

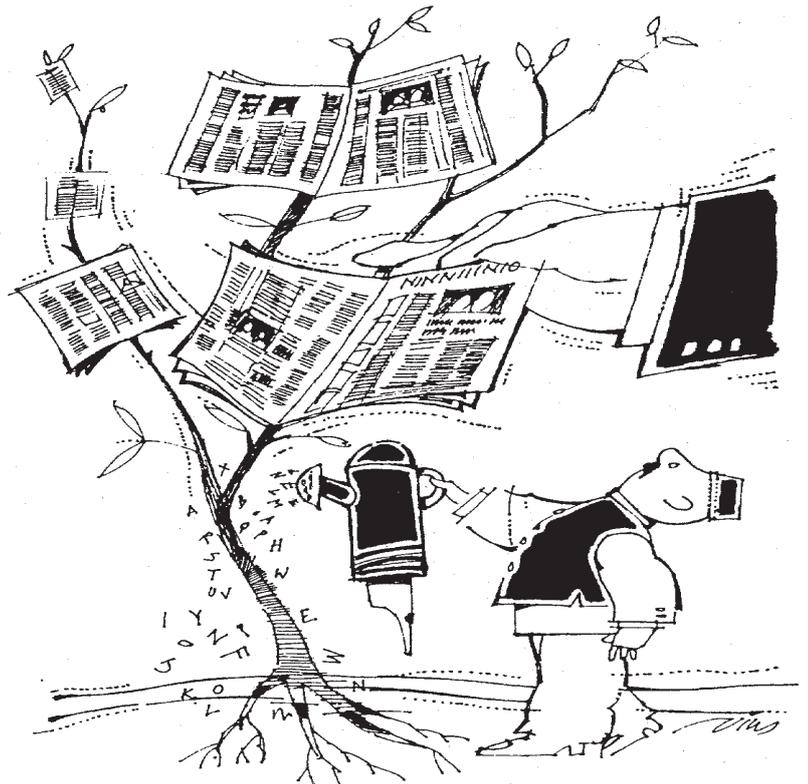
- a)Language: Asia, like Europe, has more than 20 languages. Using English to communicate seems to be the only way for such regional discussions. Skill in English writing is essential for efficient communication. Lack of this skill hampers participation.
- b)Email connection: technical support plays an important part to ensure email is received by the participants. Sometimes the moderator had to use FAX to supplement when email didn’t work due to electricity or server breakdown, virus or hacker attack.
- c)Many readers, few writers: online forum should not stand alone. Face-to-face meeting of online participants is more important than cyber-discussion which is really only an alternative. Moreover, it is essential to genuine discussion that participants understand the new medium. For example, online participants have to be responsive to arguments and willing to write. Only a few wrote to the forum before the seminar, but contributions increased after the seminar was held. This proved something, didn’t it?

d) Need to train more online moderators: If online forum is to be used more and more in national or regional conferences, moderated online forums will need more moderators to facilitate discussions. We need to train more people in this new field.

e) Need more participation and voice in the cyber-world through homepage making as a way to bridge the digital division: The presence of grassroots communicators in the increasingly popular cyber-world is a critical step of empowerment and awareness building on human dignity and reconciliation issues. AR-WACC's three-year regional project titled "Alternative Media and Information Society" will address this and other related issues. The first year's activity will be the regional consultation to be held in Hong Kong from 12th –16th October, 2000. Details of this consultation can be found in the AR-WACC homepage (see address below).

AR-WACC has, under my co-ordination, entered into the e-communication era. It has its homepage www.arwacc.org as an alternative means for advocacy of Christian values of communication, for community building and for making their presence and voice heard in the cyber world. The regional association's business has been conducted through a private password-controlled homepage that serves as a bulletin board for decision making. The homepage is managed by a Japanese webmaster. It is an example of the alliance of digital have and have-nots, encapsulating eight countries in Asia — South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, and the Philippines, Thailand, India, Indonesia and Myanmar where the Excom members come from. Recently the Korean hosting service has been extended to the WACC Pacific Region www.pacificwacc.org, giving a helping hand to the south Pacific WACC members because of the high price of owning a homepage in that region. I'll help design the pacific homepage until they have trained the webmaster to update and upgrade their own site. I'm sure this kind of Internet service can be extended to other regions of WACC or partner organisations upon request.

Source: EPD-Entwicklungspolitik 14/15, 2000



Malysiakini

Malaysian Daily on the DotCom Path to Democracy

By Dr. M. Nadarajah*

Truth often poses a threat to (State) Power

Use the Internet explorer or Netscape navigator or any other search engine you like. Type www.malysiakini.com or type www.malaysia.com.my for its mirror site.

You will, in an instant, be taken to a neat looking site with pleasant colours and informative reports on Malaysia. “Only the news that matters” may not catch your attention if you are not Malaysian or are not interested in the goings-on in Malaysia. However, it will capture the attention of a Malaysian who is looking for fair reports on their world. Malysiakini dot com is really about the politics of “truth” in Malaysia. For “truth”, as the controversial filmmaker, Oliver Stone, suggests in his film, JFK, “often poses a threat to (state) power”.

Malysiakini, an independent bilingual news source and Malaysia’s first professionally produced online newspaper on the Internet, offers anyone interested, alternative narratives on Malaysia that follow the convention that an increasing number of Malaysians as well as others see as constituting “independent journalism” (read “a journalism not guided by officialdom”) and therefore as fair, honest and courageous. It is seen as taking an increasing number of readers closer to the “truth” of what is happening in Malaysia. That this is so, is clear when one considers the visitors per day to the site – this has increased from about 75,000 hits at the beginning of this year to about 110,000 today.

Malysiakini came into existence at an opportune time in Malaysian political history. The sacking and arrest of deputy prime minister, Anwar Ibrahim, in 1998 set in motion a wave of protest and changes in Malaysia, all demanding “reformasi” (reformation, in particular political reformation). It brought many issues of critical importance into focus, covering socio-cultural, political, legal, economic and technological aspects. An issue of particular importance during the height of the Anwar episode was the behaviour of the mainstream media. Many Malaysians were suspect of the reliability, honesty and fairness of the mainstream Malaysian media, both print and electronic. It dawned on them that they are not going to get the “truth” in their mainstream media but only what the government wanted them to read or to know i.e the government’s rendering of the “truth”. Many did not want to read just one side of the story but the other side too. However, in mainstream media, the “other side” is almost always “demonised”.

The Malaysian government has, over a period of time, gathered a large number of legal instruments which have been used to inhibit democratic involvement and deliberations by controlling spontaneous or non-governmental, active civil society-based collective action and through restricting communication and dissemination. Legislation like the Official Secrets Act



Source: *Südostasien* 2/2000

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(OSA) or the Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA) seek to control alternative rendering of “truth”, disallowing people to arrive at the “truth” through deliberations and involvement. In addition, the Executive has also gained supremacy over the other arms of democratic constitution, in particular the Judiciary, severely affecting its impartiality. Truth had become an unfortunate casualty of the modernisation of Malaysia. The processes people could use to arrive at the truth were in serious jeopardy.

Malaysia’s aggressive Promotion for IT

The Anwar episode made many Malaysian actively turn to the international press for information about their country. However, something else was also emerging. And the PM Dr. Mahathir Mohamad had himself contributed to it. This was Malaysia’s aggressive promotion of IT. Malaysia’s encouragement of IT and the multi-media super-corridor (MSC) was to alter the basis for economic growth in Malaysia. However, the promotion of these technologies, in particular the Internet technologies, in its interaction with the political reality at the turn of the millennium and the “truth” seeking Malaysians made a pathway that helped recover and place in the hands of the people, the power to offer alternative renderings of truth. With the government’s stand “no Net censorship” - basically to encourage investment - there was finally a way to get news uninfluenced by the government about Malaysia.

Internet activism in Malaysia took shape within the context of the Anwar episode. Both Mahathir and Anwar had inadvertently contributed to a new form of activism and dissemination of “truth”. Within two or three months of the Anwar arrest in late September 1998, there were over 50 sites on Anwar and issues related to Anwar. Malaysians with Internet connection got their information online and those who had no access to computers and Internet, got photocopies of postings on the Net from their friends and reformasi activists. All this meant that there was a growing number of Malaysians who wanted news about their country reported to them without fear or favour. It is this opportune moment in Malaysia’s political history that saw the birth of Malaysia’s own online newspaper, Malaysiakini.

This dot com Enterprise was waiting to happen

Malaysiakini was founded by Steven Gan and Premesh Chandran. Both met when they were student activists in Australia. They returned to Malaysia in the mid-90s and worked in the newly formed English daily, the SUN. They of course believed that it would be an independent paper but to their disappointment they soon found out that the paper was “just as tame as the others”. In 1997, they left the SUN and the local media scene. Premesh Chandran joined the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) as a researcher. Steven Gan, who has been involved in the fight for press freedom for many years, went to Bangkok to work for one of the more independent papers in the region, the Nation (<http://www.nationmultimedia.com>). But they kept in touch.

An opportunity was in the making. Malaysia was in the midst of a political crisis after the sacking and arrest of Anwar Ibrahim. Internet technologies had become available. The government had promised no Net censorship to encourage investment. The mainstream media was faced with its worst credibility crisis. The 10th annual election was announced and was to

be held on November 29th. People were looking for fair news reports. Nine days before the election, on November 20th 1999, Malaysiakini was born. In the language of the market, there could have been no better time. This dot com enterprise was waiting to happen.

Malaysiakini was launched with a starting capital of RM\$ 380,000 (US\$ 100,000) from the South East Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA). SEAPA consists of journalist organisations from the three “free press” countries of Southeast Asia: Thailand, Indonesia and Philippines. It seeks to improve press freedom in their respective countries and help other countries in the region attain press freedom. Malaysiakini is its first big project. Since it went into action, Malaysiakini has grown from strength to strength. It is certainly seen as a model of independent journalism in Malaysia. A journalist with the online newspaper has even won an award from Reporters Sans Frontieres (RSF), (or Reporters without Borders), a French media-monitoring group. Malaysiakini commands respect and a lot of goodwill from other journalists, both local and foreign. Many established periodicals, both weeklies and fortnightlies have featured it, and all have promoted its popularity. As mentioned above, the site indicates a ballooning of the number of hits per day from the time it started.

Reservation among Journalists to work as an E-Journalist

The online paper is not without problems. To begin with, the government considers it as being a part of the “opposition-reformasi” group and not as a virtual media institution promoting independent journalism. Since it does not have to bother with getting an annual printing license, which is a must under the PPPA, it does not have to toe or be guided by the government’s side of the story. Of course, this makes Malaysiakini’s effort to get the government’s side of the story in their reporting difficult. Permission to attend government functions has not been forthcoming. Many critics see the site as rumour-mongering or the mouthpiece of foreign powers. In addition to these problems, not many Malaysians have access to the online paper at the moment. The total number of Internet users hovers around 1.45 million with only about 600,000 Internet subscribers. Thus, only eleven percent of Malaysians have a private PC only six percent of which surf the WWW. This a very small number and is not sufficient to concern the government very seriously, for the moment at least. There are also problems in getting journalists to work for the paper. In spite of the fact that salaries match the going market rate. There is still reservation among journalists to work as an e-journalist as well as for a paper that is mistakenly seen as crudely anti-government and therefore incapable of offering a stable career option.

Troubling Finances

Financing the paper has been another major issue. There have been attempts to buy the newspaper. Steven Gan for instance, has been offered amounts of between RM 2 to RM 5 million by venture capitalists. Not completely against this idea, Steven Gan does not intend to give more than 20% to pure commercial interests. The paper has been toying with a number of other ideas to make itself financially strong and viable.

For instance, it intends to launch an “Invest in Press Freedom” fund. Readers can donate a small sum of money, which can later be converted into shares. Another idea is to set up a

foundation by supporters of the online newspaper. As of now, Malaysiakini is not operating without income. The present advertising revenue is about RM 10, 000 a month. However, all this is not enough for a move into the next phase of greater contribution to independent journalism, a phase that requires, according to Steven Gan, over RM 3 million. More problems. Much to the disappointment of many surfers who have come to depend on Malaysiakini, this announcement was found at the site at the end of July 2000: "Excessive traffic flow had triggered a shutdown of Malaysiakini's server on Monday, July 24th. We have changed to a new server and it will take a few days to go online. We apologise for the inconvenience caused". The newspaper was inaccessible for a few days. Many thought that the powers-that-be were behind the problem. Not so, announced an editorial. It was because of the unscrupulous US-based web host. Because of this problem of hosting the site, Malaysiakini is now testing its own server. Very recently, its mirror site at www.malaysiakini.com.my was hacked. The hacker identified as "The Immorale Xeno's" left the following message: "Do we need a morale (sic) code? No, we don't".

Net becomes Battleground for Truth

Even with all these problems, Malaysiakini does not show any signs of being an organisation waiting to move into oblivion. It has not become a part of the "world wide cob-web", as have many. They are, as it is said "going strong". With growing Internet activism, perhaps the only present danger one needs to look out for involves the growing attempt by many governments to develop surveillance technology and to control - not regulate - the internet. The Net has become a battleground for "truth". In the constitution of the "truth", many players have come to limit the monologue narratives of authoritarian power. Malaysiakini is one of them.



East/West Webmasters' Meeting in Lithuania

Together in Different Worlds

The Educational and Religious Media Forum was held in Lithuania between the 5th and the 9th of July. As well as being the first meeting of Catholic Video Producers from Eastern Europe, it was also the first meeting of webmasters not only from the region, but also from western European countries, from the U.S. and Canada. Cameco asked July Ball, one of the participants, to send us a brief article on this special East-West Meeting. Here is her very personal report:

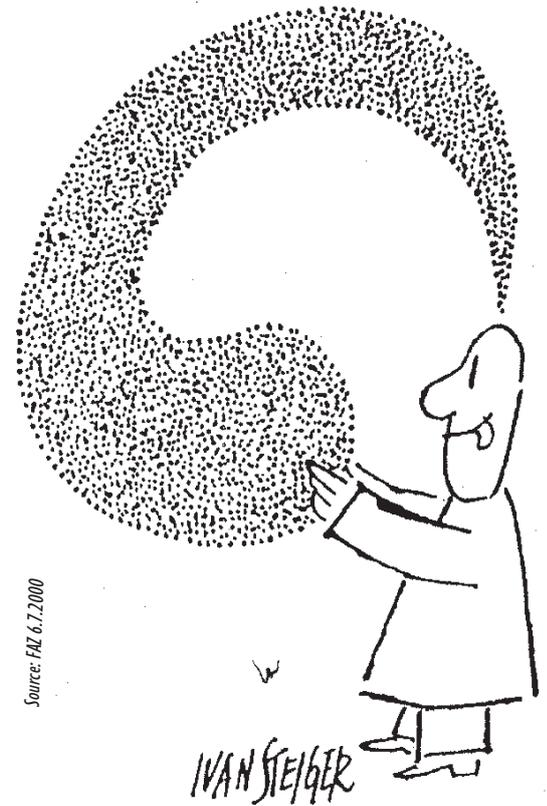
“So, how was the meeting for webmasters? What did you think of their web sites?”

Those were the kinds of questions I heard from co-workers here at St. Anthony Messenger Press when I returned from my trip to Lithuania in July. Members of our Internet staff in particular were interested in the details of the meeting, held July 6-7 in Kaunas while the members of UNDA-OCIC continued their scheduled meeting in Vilnius.

Our small group spent one full day and part of a second day at the diocesan seminary in Kaunas. Robert Molhant led the meeting and co-ordinated our discussion. Present were webmasters from Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, and Slovenia. I was the representative of the AmericanCatholic.org, the web site of St. Anthony Messenger Press, a Franciscan publishing house in Cincinnati, Ohio. (Neither our webmaster nor the editor of our web site was able to attend the meeting. As managing editor I was a substitute—a very lucky one!)

As the representative of each web site stood to give a report and show highlights of his or her site, I tried to take careful notes. But now, as I look back at the notes I brought back from our days in Kaunas, they are confusing and rather hard to read. But my impressions are still clear:

- We are all using the world wide web in creative ways, but the ways we choose to use it are influenced by realities such as budget limitations, staff and time. The webmasters are producing very impressive web sites under extremely challenging circumstances. Most of them spoke of small budgets, long hours and endless pressures. Still, they keep to their tasks with energy and with creativity, often finding volunteers to assist them.
- Our audiences vary widely in their interests, needs and expectations. In the USA, where I live, most of us are drowning in information and stimulation from TV, radio, newspapers, other print publications, the Internet. The choices can be so overwhelming that, by the end of the day, I often feel I cannot fit any more information into my head! But the reality of many Americans is distinctly different from that of people who live in countries where information is withheld or filtered, or where sources of news are few or even unreliable. For now at least, the way each of us uses the web will have to be significantly different, depending on our audiences. For example, visitors to AmericanCatholic.org can find Church-related information and news



from many sources, so we try to feed their souls and their desire for information by drawing on special Franciscan-oriented materials we can create or which already exist. Our new site (now under construction) will reach out to former Catholics, who make up a large part of the American population. Our e-greetings (www.CatholicGreetings.org) tap into the spirituality of many who visit our site.

- What a difference language makes! Some webmasters are overseeing the translation of documents from Vatican II for their web sites. For American Catholics interested in such reading, these documents have been available in English since the Council itself. This is true of other information as well, including papal statements, pastoral letters from the American bishops, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, results of international synods, etc.

- My brief experiences in Kaunas suggest to me that all of us—east and west—have much in common as pioneers in the Internet. We have a shared goal of attracting visitors to our web sites with material that helps them live more fully human and Christian lives. We all desire to provide accurate information about Church teaching and Church-related events.

- But our differences are many, beginning with the history of the Church in our various countries. The Church in many parts of Central and Eastern Europe was suppressed for so many years. During that time Catholics did not have access to full and accurate information about changes in the Church or even events within their own countries. Meanwhile, in the United States Catholics have at least had the opportunity to be fully informed about their faith, changes brought by Vatican II, the latest social teaching, etc. In addition, we do not claim large numbers of people who have left their homeland and may be seeking a link with their past when they visit our site. At St. Anthony Messenger Press we have the luxury of many printed products that we can promote and attempt to sell through our online catalogue. We have certain freedoms because we are not an official Church web site, though we do operate with the explicit approval of the Archbishop of Cincinnati.

- Our worlds are different, but the key for all of us—east and west—is to know our audiences and to respond to their needs as best we can. AmericanCatholic.org is seeking to reach out to an audience totally different from that of all the other sites who were represented at the meeting in Kaunas, but we are all part of the same world wide web community.

For me, the webmasters' meeting in Kaunas was a pleasant and productive experience. But it was only the beginning. One of our members, Miklos Pasztor, created a special web mailing list for participants in the meeting even before we left Lithuania. Our hope is that the creativity and good communication begun in Kaunas will continue.

For many years now I have thought of myself as a "citizen of the world." The many travel opportunities I've had have put me in touch with a wonderful mix of people and cultures. And my natural interest in current events has helped me to be informed about the struggles and hopes of people around the globe. But I am still filled with wonder at the rich international, intercultural experiences I had in Kaunas. It was humbling to spend time with such gifted, hard-working and dedicated pioneers in Church communications.

Contacts and Information:

The participants of the Kaunas Webmaster Meeting can be contacted through their mailing address:

kaunas@hcbc.hu

Addresses of the participants' websites:

Lithuania: www.catholic.lt

Hungary: www.katolikus.hu

US: www.americancatholic.org

Belgium: www.catho.be

Czech Republic: www.ktf.cuni.cz

Slovenia: www.rkc.si

Canada: www.devp.org

Some others in Eastern Europe and CIS offering English text versions:

Kazachstan: www.rc.net/kazakhstan

Ukraine: www.rkc.lviv.ua

Poland: www.opoka.org.pl

Latvia: www.catholic.lv

Slovakia: www.ksnr.sk

VACANCY

For the last 30 years CAMECO advises mainly church related funding agencies concerning media projects in Southern and Eastern countries. CAMECO invites applications for a vacant position at the:

Africa Desk

English speaking Western and Southern African Countries

We are seeking a new staff member with proven track-records in the field of communication and/or journalism. The work entails the evaluation of media projects sent by church funding agencies. Your expertise shall facilitate the final decision of the agencies regarding the effectiveness and feasibility of a particular project. Currently the printing area and the setting-up of community radio networks is the demand and priority in the respective African regions. This will involve regular travelling to Africa for on-the-spot project screening in order to support and advise on developments of church related media activities. You will work in a team and cooperate with church, state and non-governmental/non-profit organisations. You will report on the latest developments of your region in our quarterly „Mediaforum“ and other publications. You may also be interested in setting up and maintaining our website.

Qualifications needed are a university degree or relevant professional experience in the field of media/communications. We are looking for a dynamic individual who is experienced and familiar with project-related international development work, who has the ability to work collaboratively in a multicultural setting and shows significant experience of the religious and social situation of the respective regions. Essential for your work is an excellent command of English, and some Portuguese would be helpful. As a Christian you can identify yourself with church related development work. According to the German labour regulation you should hold an European Union passport.

Candidates meeting the essential qualifications should send their applications as soon as possible to: Catholic Media Council (CAMECO), Executive Director, P.O.Box 1912, 52021 Aachen, Germany.

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