

# *Radio Veritas Asia: A Dynamic Missionary Serving Asia's Diverse Peoples*

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**V**arious titles can capture the identity and mission of Radio Veritas Asia (RVA), now celebrating its golden anniversary of service to Asia's diverse peoples (1969-2019). It is appropriately described as "the missionary of Asia," "the Asian voice of Christianity" or "the Catholic voice of Asia." RVA's own vision statement describes this apostolic initiative as the "voice of the Church that is realising the mission of crossing borders and sharing Christ through Gospel values to the people of Asia." This Church media service reaches vast numbers of Asians, Christians and followers of other living faiths, people from countries as diverse as Myanmar, India, Vietnam—and even China.

## **Voice of popes**

Two "saint-popes" (Paul VI and John Paul II) have spoken of the pivotal mission of RVA and have also personally visited its center in Manila. Paul VI sent the following message on April 11, 1969 when RVA was inaugurated; he spoke of Radio Veritas as "giving to the truth a new and powerful voice in a continental area of increasing significance in world affairs."

On November 29, 1970, during his Manila stop on his ten-day Asian journey, Pope Paul VI visited the RVA premises. He personally offered his "encouragement for an ever more enlightened, generous and fruitful activity.... It is our fervent wish that through it [RVA] there may reach you the echo of the teachings of Christ, to raise your hearts to the God of love and truth. We hope that it will knit among you, its listeners, bonds of evangelical love ... [so that] you may together undertake the construction of a more just and more united society." In addition, from the RVA compound, Paul VI sent a lengthy message to all the peoples of

Asia, noting that “the Church, by virtue of her essential catholicity, cannot be alien to any country or people; she is bound to make herself native to every clime, culture and race.”

Twenty-five years later, on January 14, 1995, during special ceremonies marking its silver jubilee, Pope John Paul II praised RVA for its quarter-century service and challenged it to find an “ever more effective way of sustaining and informing the faith of those who already believe in Christ, and of proclaiming him and his Kingdom to those who do not yet know him.” For RVA, “the future can only mean greater commitment to evangelisation as the Third Millennium of the Redemption approaches.”

Furthermore, John Paul II said that this “voice of Asian Christianity” is a “powerful expression of the co-responsibility of the bishops of Asia” in fulfilling the “Church’s missionary mandate.” Through its diversity of programs, RVA “contributes to the human development of countless individuals and families.” It also provides consolation and strength “to the Church of Silence and to all those Christians who have suffered and continue to suffer for their fidelity” to their faith and to the Church.

In his apostolic exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia* (1999), John Paul II said: “I echo the Synod Fathers’ commendation of Radio Veritas Asia, the only continent-wide radio station for the Church in Asia, for its almost thirty years of evangelisation through broadcasting. Efforts must be made to strengthen this excellent instrument of mission ... [as] an important means of sustaining and nurturing a sense of Catholic identity and of spreading knowledge of Catholic moral principles” (EA 48).

### **Milestones of RVA history**

Pope Pius XII first had the idea of a Church radio station for Asians to address the needs of Catholics in the region. On December 10, 1958 (still in the pre-Vatican II era) at a meeting in Manila, the Conference of Southeast Asian Bishops decided to establish, operate, and maintain a Catholic radio station to serve as an instrument of evangelisation and information. Radio Veritas studios were formally inaugurated on April 11, 1969. RVA relied on shortwave radio technology to reach audiences in the Asia-

Pacific, the Indian subcontinent, and mainland China; it also reached many Filipino overseas workers in the Middle East. Financial support from the German Church aid agencies Missio and Misereor as well as the Vatican's Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples has been substantial; this is complemented with assistance from various local Churches throughout Asia.

In addition to the encouragement given by Popes Paul VI and John Paul II (already noted), other significant milestones in the history of RVA include its brave coverage of the assassination of former senator Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino on August 21, 1983; RVA was the only radio station to broadcast the slain senator's funeral procession in Manila. Then, on February 22, 1986, through Radio Veritas Cardinal Sin called the Filipino populace to show support and converge on EDSA [the main thoroughfare in metro Manila]; this resulted in the four-day bloodless revolution now known as the "People Power Revolution." In the same year, RVA received the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award (popularly called "Asia's Nobel Peace Prize") for "its role in using truth to depose an oppressive and corrupt regime and restore Filipino faith in the electoral process." In 1991, Radio Veritas separated into two entities: the "Asia-wide" branch and the "domestic" segment that serves the Philippine public; both continue their effective operations today.

### **Vision of missionary evangelisation**

An official statement of RVA for its silver anniversary captures well its vision of evangelisation: "Radio Veritas Asia seeks to reaffirm and strengthen its commitment in proclaiming to peoples and cultures the message of the Gospel." It strives to be "a stimulus of authentic human values and an instrument of salvation in Jesus Christ." One may validly assert that RVA fulfils Pope Paul VI's succinct description of evangelisation: "evangelising means bringing the Good News into all strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 18). Another expression of this same vision is to see mission as "integral evangelisation," addressing all

dimensions of the human person and society, including the political, economic, cultural, educational, social, and religious aspects of a truly human life.

Thus, as RVA broadcasts in about twenty languages, it provides a wide diversity of programmes, fostering the growth of Asia's local Churches and their role in dialogue with religions and cultures. It also airs news and programmes on health, community development, science and technology, women and youth empowerment, family issues, and historical perspectives. Readings from the sacred texts of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam are broadcast. In addition, there are programmes on Christian liturgy and catechesis, as well as features about significant Asian personalities who have contributed to integral human development and liberation in the Asian context. Truly, RVA seeks to bring Gospel values into all dimensions of life of Asia's diverse peoples.

RVA also seeks to integrate the paradigm of evangelisation promoted by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). The FABC vision of the Asian Church's mission is captured in its "triple dialogue" formula, initially enunciated in the First FABC Plenary Assembly in 1974. It envisions genuinely Asian local churches "in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions—in brief, with all the life-realities of the people." In FABC V (1990) the vision was reaffirmed: "Mission will mean a dialogue with Asia's poor, with its local cultures, and with other religious traditions." FABC X (2012) noted: "We thank the Lord for a challenging vision of Church in Asia." In a word, this *operative paradigm* of holistic evangelisation [the "triple dialogue" approach] is the *interpretive key* to understanding and appreciating the dynamic local Churches in Asia today. And, RVA has consistently fostered this "Asian" vision of being Church in today's contemporary societies.

### **A special mission: RVA's Mandarin service**

A beautiful and comprehensive presentation of "Forty Years of Mandarin on Radio Veritas Asia" appeared in the *Sunday Examiner* of Hong Kong on 19 January 2019. Some highlights from that very

informative article (no author identified) are quoted here to provide a brief overview of this important Church initiative.

“Officially launched on 11 April 1969, it [RVA] was primarily oriented towards what was referred to as the Silent Churches and a fledgling Mandarin Service was begun just two months after its launch, but transmitter problems forced the closure of the Overseas Department in 1973. With support from the archbishop of Manila, Jaime Cardinal Sin, the service was resurrected later in the same year, and Father Ismael Zuloaga, who became known as the Shepherd of the Mandarin Service, managed to get the language back on the air again.”

“On 15 September 1976 test broadcasts in Mandarin were made in southeastern Asia and on 1 December 1978 more test broadcasts were beamed into continental China from a transmitter in the island province of Palawan, the best point in the Philippines for unimpeded broadcasting into the mainland. The 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the resurrected Mandarin Service was celebrated at a gathering in Manila in early July [1978-2018].... The anniversary event served both as a review of history, as well as a search for new ways to use the Internet to strengthen contact between what is now a multi-media broadcaster and the Catholic people of China.”

Many personal testimonies of the impact of the Mandarin service have been received. “Sister Angela Liu Lijun, a former coordinator of the Radio Veritas Asia Mandarin Service, recalled she once asked a priest in China how he learned theology. He replied that an elderly priest taught him back in the days when religious activities had just been revived after the Cultural Revolution, which ran from 1966-1976. ‘But I would also have to say that I graduated from the Radio Veritas Asia seminary, because I learned so much from listening to its programmes on theology and philosophy’ he explained.”

Serving as a “missionary” to China through the Mandarin service has not always been easy. At times the radio signal has been blocked; more recently there has been interference with RVA’s website. Yet, persistent efforts have borne fruit, and new initiatives, such as WeChat, have been explored. The variety of programming has been expanded to include news stories, chat shows, music, and interviews among other creative approaches. Though clear

challenges exist, there is a spirit of optimism to genuinely serve a Mandarin-speaking audience. As Bishop Philip Huang of Hualien, Taiwan, recently remarked: “Forty years is not very long, but God’s grace was there at every moment.”

## **Conclusion**

As RVA observes its golden jubilee of service to the vast Asian continent, our hearts overflow with gratitude for what has been accomplished. Yet, all realise that missionary evangelisation is never a static reality. Change, renewal, transformation, and discernment are constants in the Church’s evangelising mission; one never finishes reading the “signs of the times” and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel (cf. GS 4). Certainly, with the Lord’s abundant graciousness, RVA’s mission in the coming fifty years will prove most fruitful—as has the past half century. Following Pope Francis’ insights, one can add one new title to describe RVA: “Asia’s Dynamic, Joyful Missionary-Disciple”!