

SUMMARY

THE MISSION OF THE MEDIA IN THE LIGHT OF THE DOCUMENTS OF THE ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE

The contemporary socio-cultural situation requires new forms of evangelisation, just as in the different epochs of great discoveries, such as the Renaissance, the invention of the printing press, the Industrial Revolution, and the birth of the modern world. Now, in these times of increased progress in the sphere of communication and information, in a very particular way, the Church is once again on the threshold of significant change. This change requires the specific reorientation of pastoral plans so that they involve even greater openness and directness in relation to the world. Therefore, creative and professional activities in this field are essential. The modern world is and will always remain the “media Areopagus” where, alongside various other institutions, the Church has not only its own designated place but also a specific mission to accomplish. In recent years this fact has caused a stir and kindled an “awakening” among both clergy and laity who are earnestly seeking not only to build the ecclesial community at the “greatest Areopagus”, but also play a decisive role in it.

Local churches have a special place in these undertakings because of the specific day-to-day media initiatives they do, which aim to make Jesus and his Gospel come alive. An excellent example of this is the Episcopate in Italy, which officially came into existence in 1954. It has proactively accompanied the development of the new culture in the media by initiating various pastoral projects aimed at providing appropriate responses to the ongoing changes in Italian society. Thus, the primary source material for this dissertation is the Italian Episcopal Conference documents issued between the years 1961-2010 which directly relate to the area of social communication.

The first part of this work explores the theme of the media in the area of cultural transformation. It reflects on what decides the essence and criteria of the new media culture. In particular it highlights the ability of media to create culture. In view of the intense development of technological information which determines

human life, and in particular the area referring to the process of interpersonal communication, the role played by the instruments of communication in the new media culture is presented.

The chapter concludes with the presentation of the “cultural project”, initiated by the Italian clergy in 1996. The project is still being developed in the context of dialogue between faith and culture. Above all, it reflects the essential presence of the Church in social and cultural life, as well as constituting the individualistic paradigm of the Church’s evangelising mission. “The project” reveals culture as a uniquely privileged environment where the Church and modern man meet.

The following chapter details the phenomenon of communication in the mission of the Church, bearing in mind that the individual will always remain both the substance and the focus of the Church. Thus, the first paragraph is devoted to the meaning and place of the individual in reference to communication. True humanisation is achieved precisely through dialogue, which occurs in the spirit of truth and love, accompanied with personal testimony as a particular expression of this process of humanisation. Considering the fact that communication, of its own nature, demands community, the next section presents the Church as a environment of human existence, in which the mystery of saving communication between God and humanity is realised. Being the instrument of mediation, the ecclesial community accepts from Christ the mission of uniting people by building and reinforcing fraternal friendship. This chapter concludes with a reflection on the enculturation of faith in the context of today, which is highly influenced by media culture. The Church cannot remain passive in the face of newly emerging forms and methods of participating in the creation of media culture. The task of the Church is to form roots in civilisation, which is born as the result of continuous cultural changes.

The presence of the Church in the world of social communication still remains the priority of both the ministers and congregation. Indeed, the scale of the substantial influence both on public opinion and, as a consequence, on shaping the profile of culture in the XXI century, is dependent on participation and engagement of both ministers and congregation. These issues are the theme of the third chapter. The media organisations which aspire to be catholic, and in union with the episcopate are included and presented in this chapter. Among these are the nationwide daily newspaper *Avvenire*, internet site and radio station *InBlu*, satellite television channel *TV2000*, and information agency *SIR*.

In the context of this presentation, different initiatives by Catholics in the area of social communication are discussed. Selected groups, which are of great help to individual work of animators, coordinators, and journalists, and which are engaged in ecclesiastical media space, are also described here. The conclusion of the chapter consists of an attempt at finding the positive and negative aspects of the media in both pastoral and evangelising activities of the local Church.

In the final chapter of the dissertation, the problem of engagement of the Italian Church in the creation of new media and new culture in praxis is considered. The reflection is given from the perspective of the Magisterium of the Italian Episcopal Conference, which demonstrates the progression of ecclesiastical thought on communication. The next topic reflects upon the deep care that the Italian Church has taken in the development of media culture. It considers the existing structures, and the areas of pastoral responsibility in terms of social communication. In particular various institutions, and their competence in organising the ministry of media in the global vision of the Italian Church, are presented. Actual propositions are made in reference to the challenges of formation in this rich and varied ecclesiastical project. Following on from the CEI documents, new challenges which have emerged as a result of the cultural changes which are happening continuously. In response to this, in the final paragraph, practical propositions for ministry are suggested, such as animators' formation through e-learning, the activities of community halls, and new local media.

Undoubtedly, all the initiatives undertaken in recent years by the Church in Italy emerge as an inevitable and significant manifestation of its participation in the promotion and support of both local and nationwide media. On the other hand, the emphasis is placed on the need for greater awareness of the role of communication tools in the mission of the Church in society, and, as a result, competent participation of people in the professional use of the media in proclaiming the Gospel. The result of these reflections is a promising proposal to create a media platform which will unify church media, with Catholic experts working in both public and private structures. It is clear that the Italian bishops have committed themselves to actively participate in shaping and promoting the image of the Church at the level of communication and culture. It is worth mentioning that the Italian bishops have repeatedly emphasised the fact that the media today should not only be seen as tools. They have become markers of a new culture, having built that in which the church wishes to actively participate. In addition, the bishops plan to implement the concept of human communication so profoundly that it is no longer seen as one of the many sectors of pastoral care, but rather as its principal dimension.

In conclusion, it is necessary to add that the media has become an epochal "Areopagus", which is strategically important, in that through it that Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ can be delivered to every human in the world. However, the reaction of the Church to the new horizons of the "unknown land" remains crucial. Contemporary social communication and its tools designate a specific vision of pastoral and evangelistic activity. One needs to bear in mind that the instruments of social communication are merely tools, and their use depends primarily on a specific person using them, as, in and of themselves, they do not have sufficient power or authority. People who use them determine how they will be applied in the modern

world, and what consequences they will bring to it. The technical parameters of these tools are not important. Therefore the key criterion must be a change of mentality, and commitment of Christians to the process of inculturation of the Gospel within the media, in such a way that they can make the message of salvation clear, and pass it on further. Undoubtedly, this presence of the Church in the mass media, which is qualitatively new, not only aims to bring the Good News to people, but also aims at a complete evangelisation of culture. The Church, sent to the world, should undertake its first and fundamental mission of proclaiming the Gospel of salvation in Jesus with new zeal and eagerness by using different media as contemporary inventions of modern technology. It should be noted that the Church as a community has all the advantages needed to ensure a fearless and convincing salvific dialogue with all people, effectively utilising the opportunities provided through the means of social communication in this century.