

Do not be afraid of new technologies!

Introduction

The words contained in the title of this article were written by John Paul II in 2005, in the document: *The Rapid Development*.¹ The Pope repeated this expression four times in the quoted text. Over the past decade, dynamic technological developments have created new questions and tasks for the Church in the context of the Internet and social media. Media advances have opened up pioneering communication opportunities for the Church, while posing additional challenges for the Church in the process of evangelisation. Social media and the Internet have become indispensable tools for communication on a global scale.

1

Pope John Paul II understood the question of the Christian presence in the media. At the same time, he paid attention to the proper preparation of those who work in this field in the Church. In his teaching, he stressed the importance of proper formation for those working in the media field. "To communication workers, and especially to believers who work in this important area of society, I apply the invitation that from the beginning of my ministry as Pastor of the universal Church I wanted to launch to the whole world: 'Do not be afraid!'"²

To be even more effective in the area of traditional media and social media, it is essential that priests, consecrated persons and lay people who publish content online on behalf of the Church are adequately formed. These people should continuously improve their skills through specialised studies, courses and workshops. The planning of media communication activities must also be approached with care, creating specific communication strategies and appropriate teams to work with. It is also important to invest in regular market research, as well as analysing media activity with professional tools.

Appropriate workshops for priests, religious and lay employees of the Catholic media sector are indispensable. These courses may include managing specific social media, being able to speak in front of the camera, creating communication strategies, Mobile Journalism, general social media training, team management, and developing advanced media and communication skills. The growing awareness of the need for a Church presence in the media is also linked to the need to adequately fund media activities, so that Catholic content is not marginalised.

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¹ John Paul II, *Rapid development*, Apostolic Letter, Vatican 2005, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/apost_letters/2005/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20050124_il-rapido-sviluppo.html.

² Ibid., 14.

New technologies must be considered as human inventions that can be used for the mission of the Church. The Church has the opportunity to use these tools to reach a wide range of the faithful and to carry out its evangelisation and pastoral mission more effectively. Do not be afraid of new technologies! “These rank ‘among the marvelous things’ – *inter mirifica* – which God has placed at our disposal to discover, to use and to make known the truth, also the truth about our dignity and about our destiny as his children, heirs of his eternal Kingdom.”³

Prospects for the Church’s role in this regard can be promising, provided that the relevant institutions, and in particular those responsible for evangelisation, adapt to the recommendations on communication and use the available online tools. The future of social media and the Internet is difficult to predict, as it depends to a large extent on the development of technologies that can introduce completely new, perhaps crucial, solutions. Certainly, an important factor is the development of data technology that favours video content and live streaming.

However, it is worth remembering that the Church emphasises that evangelisation is first and foremost the work of the Holy Spirit. However, this does not exempt the faithful and Church leaders from seeking new solutions and adapting the message to changing times. New technologies should therefore not be feared, because they are tools that can bring many benefits to society and the Church. “Advancements in technology have made new kinds of human interactions possible. In fact, the question is no longer whether to engage with the digital world, but how.”⁴

3

Elsewhere in the document, John Paul II seeks to motivate media workers to engage more in social communication, despite real opposition from those who are not necessarily supportive of the Church. The Holy Father expressed his conviction that commitment to working with the media can bear fruit, even in the face of difficulties and resistance. “Do not be afraid of being opposed by the world! Jesus has assured us, ‘I have conquered the world!’”⁵

The first thing to understand is that technology has always been part of human progress. From the invention of the wheel to the discovery of electricity, humanity has always pursued further discoveries. The internet and social media are a next step in this evolution. New technologies drive progress, improve quality of life, help perform many tasks faster, give access to information, enable remote communication, can be a tool to solve complex social problems, create jobs, improve quality of life or facilitate education. In the Church, new technologies can be used to reach more people, for evangelisation, education, spiritual support, or charity.

³ Ibid., 14.

⁴ Dicastery for Communication, Towards full presence, Pastoral reflection on engagement with social media, Vatican 2023, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/dpc/documents/20230528_dpc-verso-piena-presenza_en.html.

⁵ John Paul II, *The Rapid Development...*, 14.

In the 21st century, in an era of globalisation and easily accessible information on the Internet, the language of media often becomes very specific. Global communication processes are influencing changes in Church communication, the evangelisation process, and every activity related to Church communication in the media. The Church's language of communication has evolved over the centuries, but the content proclaimed by the institution remains constant; however, it is necessary to constantly adapt the language to the modern audience. Otherwise, there is a risk that the message will not be understood or that it will be received reluctantly by the recipient.

4

Awareness of the limits of work in the field of social communication creates a strong need for the professionalisation of skills, technology and wider media know-how in the Church. Therefore, in response to these challenges, the Church is increasingly investing in the development of skills related to media presence. "Do not be afraid even of your own weakness and inadequacy! The divine Master has said, 'I am with you always, until the end of the world.'"⁶

In the Church, in the field of social communication, clear leaders are needed to help is "not be afraid" of new technologies. Lack of proper communication can not only indicate a lack of competence, but also lead in the wrong direction. Therefore, there is an urgent need for more communication professionals to help understand this complex field. It is also essential to acquire the skills to manage communication and create media strategies to effectively reach the audience.

Technological developments, cultural and civil changes have led to changes in communication processes. Consequently, in the field of media, attention must be paid to the phenomenon of convergence, that is, the ability of media processes and content to interpenetrate each other. On the other hand, media culture itself is undergoing a very rapid transformation, leading to ever-new forms of communication and paradigm shifts. Hence the importance of a professional approach to social communication in the Church. The aforementioned changes, including media convergence and the dynamic transformation of media culture, mean that the Church must remain flexible and ready to adapt its communication to society's evolving needs and expectations.

Conclusion

John Paul II's words about looking with courage and working with new technologies in the field of media can become a kind of motto for many people of the Church in their daily work. Attention to new emerging technologies requires responsibility for the tools used, as well as a clear awareness of what the Church is called to do. The future could bring further innovative solutions in the field of social communication and media. On the other hand, the elements that help to use

⁶ Ibid., 14.

new technologies correctly remain constant: training, professionalisation, cooperation and awareness of responsibility for a common goal.

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