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Francis: church communications must be a 'dialogue'

Thomas C. Fox | Sep. 21, 2013 The Francis Chronicles

Pope Francis said Saturday the goal of church communications is ?to understand how to enter into dialogue with the men and women of today in order to appreciate their desires, their doubts and their hopes.?

His words reflected the opening paragraph of the Vatican II document, the ?Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,? which reads: ?The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men [and women] of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.?

Speaking to participants of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, according to Vatican radio, Francis said: ?The challenge is to rediscover, through the means of social communication as well as by personal contact, the beauty that is at the heart of our existence and our journey, the beauty of faith and of the encounter with Christ.?

?I believe that the goal is to understand how to enter into dialogue with the men and women of today in order to appreciate their desires, their doubts and their hopes. They are men and women who sometimes feel let down by a Christianity that to them appears sterile and in difficulty as it tries to communicate the depth of meaning that comes with the gift of faith. We do in fact witness today, in the age of globalization, a growing sense of disorientation and isolation; we see, increasingly, a loss of meaning to life, an inability to connect with a ?home? and a struggle to build meaningful relationships. It is therefore important to know how to dialogue and, with discernment, to use modern technologies and social networks in such a way as to reveal a presence that listens, converses and encourages. Allow yourselves, without fear, to be this presence, expressing your Christian identity as you become citizens of this environment. A church that follows this path learns how to walk with everybody.

Below is the full text of the prepared remarks by Pope Francis

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to greet you and to thank you for your work and commitment to the important apostolate of social communications. I wish to thank Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli for his kind words of greeting extended to me on your behalf. I would like to share some thoughts with you.

1. The first: the importance that the Church attaches to the area of communication. This year is the fiftieth anniversary of the Conciliar Decree Inter Mirifica. This anniversary is more than a commemoration; the Decree expresses the Church?s solicitude for communication in all its forms, which are important in the work of evangelization. In the last few decades the various means of communication have evolved significantly, but the Church?s concern remains the same, though it assumes new forms and expressions.

The world of communications, more and more, has become an ?environment? for many, one in which people communicate with one another, expanding their possibilities for knowledge and relationship (cf. Benedict XVI, Message for the 2013 World Communications Day). I wish to underline these positive aspects notwithstanding the limits and the harmful factors that also exist and which we are all aware of.

2. In this context - and this is the second reflection - we must ask ourselves: what role should the Church have in terms of the practical means of communication at her disposal? In every situation, beyond technological considerations, I believe that the goal is to understand how to enter into dialogue with the men and women of today in order to appreciate their desires, their doubts and their hopes. They are men and women who sometimes feel let down by a Christianity that to them appears sterile and in difficulty as it tries to communicate the depth of meaning that comes with the gift of faith. We do in fact witness today, in the age of globalization, a growing sense of disorientation and isolation; we see, increasingly, a loss of meaning to life, an inability to connect with a ?home? and a struggle to build meaningful relationships. It is therefore important to know how to dialogue and, with discernment, to use modern technologies and social networks in such a way as to reveal a presence that listens, converses and encourages. Allow yourselves, without fear, to be this presence, expressing your Christian identity as you become citizens of this environment. A Church that follows this path learns how to walk with everybody.

3. This is a challenge, which we must all face together in this environment of communications where the issues are not principally technological. We must ask ourselves ? and here I come to the third step ? are we up to the task of bringing Christ into this area and of bringing others to meet Christ? Are we able to communicate the face of a Church, which is ?home? to all? The challenge is to rediscover, through the means of social communication as well as by personal contact, the beauty that is at the heart of our existence and our journey, the beauty of faith and of the encounter with Christ. Even in this world of communications, the Church must warm the hearts of men and women. Do our presence and plans measure up to this requirement? We hold a precious treasure that is to be passed on, a treasure that brings light and hope. They are greatly needed. All this, however, means that priests, religious and laity must have a thorough and adequate formation. The great digital continent not only involves technology but is made up of real men and women who bring with them their hopes, their suffering, their concerns and their pursuit of what is true, beautiful and good. We need to bring Christ to others, through these joys and hopes, like Mary, who brought Christ to the hearts of men and women; we need to pass through the clouds of indifference without losing our way; we need to descend into the darkest night without being overcome and disorientated; we need to listen to the dreams, without being seduced; to share their disappointments, without becoming despondent; to sympathize with those whose lives are falling apart, without losing our own strength and identity (cf. Pope Francis, Address to the Bishops of Brazil, 27 July 2013, n. 4).

Dear friends, it is important to bring the solicitude and the presence of the Church into the world of communications so as to dialogue with the men and women of today and bring them to meet Christ. This must be done, however, in complete awareness that we ourselves are means of communication and that the real problem does not concern the acquisition of the latest technologies, even if these make a valid presence possible. It is necessary to be absolutely clear that the God in whom we believe, who loves all men and women intensely, wants to reveal himself through the means at our disposal, however poor they are, because it is he who is at work, he who transforms and saves us.

Let us pray that the Lord may make us zealous and sustain us in the engaging mission of bringing him to the world. I ask you for your prayers and assure you of my Blessing.

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