In media(s) res

The Church, in her mission of spreading the Good News, has been continually searching for new ways of proclamation in encounter with various cultures, using also the means of communication. In the beginning, she approached the media with caution, opposition and suspicion, viewed them as rivals; then started to accept them as co-workers, to finally use them as a means of evangelization recognizing a new life area that is in need of evangelization. In order to better understand this developmental path, it is necessary to observe it in the context of historical circumstances and cultural setting of a particular period. The process of adjustment, cooperation and coexistence between the Church and media have been still developing, since media have been greatly changing in terms of their potential and influence, calling for new responses, standpoints and ways.

It would be interesting to present the relationship between the Church and media through history, especially after the invention of the press, film, radio and television, and ultimately the Internet as a basis of a true revolution of communication possibilities manifested in the creation of virtual reality. The Church's attention on media and new forms of communication gained a new impetus with the Second Vatican Council Decree *Inter Mirifica* as well as with the papal messages on the occasions of the World Day of Social Communications. These messages offer an interesting overview of the Church's opening to media, bringing significant theological-pastoral guidance to believers and to media workers. They are a sign of the Church's concern for a complete development of man and society. Over the past two decades, in their messages, popes especially speak about the Internet, social networks, new forms of witnessing and evangelization of the digital continent, not failing to point to the problems, difficulties and dangers associated with new media.

We are facing completely new forms of communications that are a challenge for the Church. Today's media have gone beyond the traditional communication tools; creating a new culture they have become a new life space for many people. The time of great changes, technological progress, mobility and fast way of living have brought revolutionary changes to the area of communications. Communication has become faster and easier, offers an irre-

sistible illusion of freedom and omnipresence creating new forms of sociability and virtual residences. Because of the imperativeness of daily use of modern means of social communications, a lot of people, especially the young ones, are being forcibly immersed in virtual space, which takes them away a considerable part of time, moves them away from real life, from encounters and good relations. In this way, many are unconsciously becoming actors in contemporary communication revolution. In a multitude of available information and entertainment contents, it is harder and harder to choose those that should be the basis for the conclusion, true wisdom and formation of mature viewpoints.

By using contemporary social media we lose privacy, spontaneity of personal encounters, and magical beauty of searching for knowledge through exploration, reading and inference. As early as in the 60s of the last century, a well-known media theorist Marshall McLuhan talks about media as about the "extension of man". The result of this narrow connection between the media and man in our days is that the means of communications have become not only the extension of man but are closely linked to man's survival in the world, immersed in various forms of communication and new digital sociality. Off and on the flashes of man's own consciousness come to him signalling that something strange and unnatural is happening, but they quickly fade away before the noisy glitter of new communications offer. It is odd how quickly many have been drawn into an unusual story with an uncertain outcome.

Technological progress, particularly in the field of media, has demonstrated unimagined achievements, but it has also shown obvious disproportion between the spiritual and technical-material development. This progress seems to have reached nearly the limit of growth and no signs of future development of means of communications, which could follow at the same pace the dazzling development of communication technology as we remember in the past two decades, are to be seen. The only area that still fosters the communication tools development is the virtual world into which people are being intensively immersed in the ways that they are increasingly moving away from real life and relationships. It can be noticed that in contemporary communications only a part of human being has been left in the real world, while simultaneously he is being deeply dipped into the virtual world, which results in new forms of asociality and addiction. Along with pride in technological successes, achievements of communication technology, speed and ease of communication and dynamic life of social networks, we can see that

the phenomenon of "confused languages" is coming about, a replica of misunderstanding and mutual drifting away, which is contrary to previous expectations. Many have become strangers to each other, and the development of technological progress has brought not only the sense of pride, but also uncertainty, fear and caution. Moreover, many people experience a strange hybrid coexistence of real and virtual world. Technological development of means of communications can be continued in this imposed rhythm only if new needs are being created among people, but it seems that just in that area the point of saturation has been reached, which might be a sign of positive moves backward, towards classical communication and the forgotten quality of personal relationships.

The development of modern media based on the Internet represents a new opportunity for the Church. It opens up new possibilities and encourages new forms of evangelization with more openness and dialogical transparency. Pope John Paul II rightly states that "Those who proclaimed Gospel before us could not even imagine such a wide auditorium" and that this "modern pulpit", through the Church's dynamic openness and dialogical and reasoned breakthrough to new evangelization paths, might become the "new Areopagus" that opens the possibility of inculturating the Gospel into the contemporary world (Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio,* No. 37).

Thanks to the interactive possibilities of communication, the Internet can really become a new *forum* for the proclamation of the Gospel. The *Digital Forum,* as a place of everyday noise and rushes of life, the place of encounter and exchange of opinions and arguments, is an ideal opportunity for the Church to offer, precisely in this modern square and in the meeting point of cultures and ideas, this powerful, provocative and stimulating truth of the Gospel. *To put out into deep water the Internet nets* is a call for the Church to be actively present in a noisy crowd of confusing tones and different beliefs. The forum-dialogue elements of the newly shaped proclamation reveal also the Catholic character of the Church.

In the area of the "digital continent", as Pope Benedict XVI calls it, the Church should pay special attention to the emergence of numerous virtual churches in which people live with their demands and problems, the people who in a different way, outside the framework of the institutional Church, want to realize their relationship with God. Their stay in the space of virtual churches is an expression of their search for God. It is necessary to enter this world willingly and openly, and to adjust to the culture and expression of the digital world in the ways the Church, in her missionary endea-

vours, has already entered the world of different cultures, bringing a strong and vital message of the Gospel, without aggressive suppression of the same cultures. It is clear that within that virtual world it is not possible to realize the fullness of religious and sacramental communion. Anyway, the Church has to be aware of the fact that she has been sent to all people to the end of the world and that she has to enter into this part of the virtual world and into this area of religiosity, which should not be ignored but illuminated with the richness of the Gospel message, attracting these people to the real dynamic life of Christian communities. For Christians, the virtual world is always a challenge to their own credibility, to the authenticity of personal communication following the example of Christ, the "perfect Communicator", and also bearing witness through the "Christian digital profile".

In addition to the mission of proclaiming the Gospel through modern means of communication, which is rich in new opportunities and challenges, the Church is also called to take care of the integrity of man's development, especially in the time when *Antropos* (man, or the "one who looks upwards") becomes a prisoner of new, "must have" devices, and thus he is being drawn in the autistic world of superficial communication that separates him from real life and from the people of his life environment. He becomes bound to the new world without obligations and problems, which detaches him from the "look upwards" or the look to others. Thus, new forms of addiction and alienation are developing about which the Church needs to be clearly and persistently talking about. Also, new forms of communication allow a multitude of ways of intrusion on other people's privacy, violence against others, escape from reality, and isolation in virtual spaces thanks to the possibilities of false digital profiles. Therefore, encouraging witnessing through the Christian digital profile, the Church should also point to new forms of sins, injustice and distorted relationships and talk about it clearly, as in regular catechetic teaching so too in sermons and in the sacrament of confession. An important role of the Church is in upbringing to respect the dignity of every human being and in setting clear moral principles. The Church is obliged to point to dangers related to the use of the Internet, such as many forms of alienation through video games and online gambling, distancing from reality, flight to virtuality, moral dangers related to the availability of pornographic contents, and incentives to violence. Certainly, new challenges are facing the Church for which additional courage and clarity are needed for authentic evangelization.

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At the international theological symposium *Faith in Media – Media in Faith* held at the Catholic Theological Faculty in Split from 20 to 21 October 2017, the lecturers wanted to scientifically enrich the interesting topic of correlation between faith and media. It was observed that the Church had become increasingly present in media and consequently faced with numerous possibilities and new opportunities; the media challenges for Christian anthropology as well as the media limitations in mediating the sacral content were also emphasized. In the process of inculturation of the Gospel in contemporary world, one can often observe the impoverishment of the content that has passed through the media filters, profaning the mystery message. Also, it was noticed how much media can distort the image of the Church, as well as a lack of appropriate strategy and church engagement in presenting the real image of the Church. Young people who have grown up intensively immersed in digital world, and can be considered "digital aborigines", can greatly contribute to the Church's openness to the digital communication space and enrich the new ways of pastoral care, especially by developing the ethics of communication. Through the lectures, one could observe numerous possibilities and new ways of proclaiming the Gospel through modern media, recognize the difficulties and problems that the Church must point out and cultivate an active correlation between the mystical and digital world.

After all, it is the mission and challenge to all of us.

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