

## Propaganda Fide and Mission as Communication

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**[Abstract]** Propaganda Fide, the Vatican congregation established in 1622 to support the missions of the Catholic Church in many parts of the world, has always played an important role in communication and in the mass media. Born to support the freedom of missions from the interference and influences of the great Western powers, it has always had to find special ways of communication, free and alive. At the same time, needing a relationship to help and support the missionaries, it had to find communication tools between the peripheries in the various Asian, African, and Latin American countries and the center of Catholicity. But the Catholic Church and the papacy have not always had good relations with communication. Before the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), although the popes had sympathy for the media (newspapers, radio, television), they often warned against the immoral use of such media, launching censures and prohibitions on their products, motivated by their attempts to defend ethics and orthodoxy. This has often created an image of the Church as an enemy of the modern world and of communication. The Second Vatican Council was promulgated to renew the encounter between the Church and the contemporary world and find new ways of speaking to the world, understanding the world, and making herself understood by it. One of the very first documents approved by the Council was a document on social communications (*Inter Mirifica*, 1963). With Pope John Paul II, the Church entered as an actor in the world of communication and mass media, considered not only as an instrument for spreading the Gospel and the word of God, but as the environment, the “Areopagus” to dialogue in a pluralistic world. We owe above all to the Polish pope use as protagonist of television in travel, in illness, even in his death. With Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis, internet and Twitter have become the Holy See's normal communication tools among others. The need for communication between Propaganda Fide and the missions around the world has pushed missionary institutes and congregations to make use of the mass media, helping the world to understand the political, social and religious situations of mission countries and soliciting mutual help and fraternity to face natural disasters, hunger, wars, persecutions. Some examples (AsiaNews, Eglises d'Asie, Ucanews, and others).

The Congregation of Propaganda Fide as a structural element of the Vatican congregations was and is a sign of modernity in the life of the Church and a vindication of the religious character of the Church's mission. Propaganda Fide was founded on January 6, 1622 by Pope Gregory XV. Two factors contributed to its birth:

- 1) In the 16th and 17th centuries, there was a great spiritual renaissance among Catholics, the result of the Protestant wound, which drove Catholics to oppose Protestantism, and a desire to revitalize the faith and spread it throughout the world;
- 2) Until then, the non-European missions had been placed under the protection of two political powers, Spain and Portugal. The "padroado" (that was the name given to this type of protection) had to ensure the means for travel, sustenance, and the building of missionary stations, churches, and colleges. Many times, this happened admirably. But in the long run, the two powers increasingly used missionaries and evangelization as a means to increase their own wealth and trade. The king of Spain or the king of Portugal were considered almost as divine representatives, with the power to choose bishops and missionaries, and decide strategies, catechisms, education, etc. In this way, evangelization was very often subservient, if not captive, to the economic and political interests of the political powers, while papal instructions were not followed.

From this point of view, the birth of Propaganda Fide represents a new chapter in the defense of the Christian communities' religious freedom, which also includes their spiritual dependence on the pontiff and limiting or eliminating the incursions of political power into the spiritual sphere.

From this situation, Propaganda Fide spawned a series of Apostolic Vicars (bishops in mission areas) and missionaries who did not have to swear obedience to the "padroado," but who were independent of it, being instead directly dependent on the Holy See. Their life was not very easy, as they often had to protect themselves or hide from the Spaniards and Portuguese, but it was a turning point "from the colonial mission to the purely ecclesiastical mission."<sup>1</sup>

The most important aspect of this novel approach<sup>2</sup> was the focus on fostering the development of a local clergy, attention and care towards local culture, not exporting

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<sup>1</sup> Erwin Iserloh, Josef Glazik and Hubert Jedin, "Reformation Katholische Reform und Gegenreformation," vol VI in Hubert Jedin edited, "*Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte.*" Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1967. Quoted from the Italian edition, vol. VI, Milano: Jaca Book, 1972: 745-segg.

<sup>2</sup> See the Instruction for Apostolic Vicars of 1659.

European religious models to mission countries and, for China the permission to use the Chinese language in the liturgy.<sup>3</sup>

The colonial powers, on the other hand, were opposed to the growth of locally-born priests and demanded that the new mission Church be in some way a branch of the Church in Spain or Portugal.

From the beginning, Propaganda Fide needed communication. Since it had to uphold the freedom of the missions from influence and interference by from the great Western powers, it had to find free and special ways of communication that could be kept alive at all time: it had to maintain a relationship of help and support with the missions by putting in place tools of communication between the peripheries in the various Asian, African, and Latin American countries and the center of Catholicism in Rome.

There were two basic tools for communication: firstly, the Apostolic Vicars had to send Propaganda Fide a detailed report on the state of their mission at least once a year. The second were the nuncios—at least those not attached to the crowns of Spain and Portugal—who acted as intermediaries between the missionaries and the papal Curia and the pope himself.

Propaganda Fide's emphasis on attention to local cultures pushed the missionaries to be even more profound connoisseurs of the language and customs of the populations in which they were embedded. As a result, they acted as cultural mediators, bringing together Eastern and Western cultures.

We cannot forget that after the great epic of Matteo Ricci, the Jesuits remained at the Chinese emperor's court as astronomers, and also as official translators, employed especially in the emperors' dealings with foreign delegations until the end of the 19th century.

At the same time, a large book production on China, brought to the West, provoked new ways of thinking, and reflecting on society and power.

Among the authors of these books was the Jesuit Nicholas Trigault (1577-1628), who translated Matteo Ricci's travel diaries into Latin, as well as many European scientific works into Chinese.

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<sup>3</sup> AAVV. "Die Kirche im Zeitalter des Absolutismus und der Aufklärung," Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1970. Vol. VII. In Hubert Jedin, cit. Italian edition, vol VII. Milano: Jaca Book. 1972: 365.

Another instrument of cultural mediation was the so-called “Edifying and Curious Letters...” written by Jesuit missionaries or the Missions Etrangères de Paris, which influenced even the rationalist and Enlightenment world of the time.

It must also be said that these missions in the East—and especially in China—provoked an international debate. It is impressive to read that missionaries not only in China, but also in the Philippines, Mexico, and German, French and Spanish bishops, etc., intervened in alternating phases on the “question of the Chinese rites.”<sup>4</sup>

Even more interesting are the *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith*, starting in 1824. From France, this publication spread throughout Europe, to the point of being translated into 19 different languages. According to historians, such as Robert Streit, OMI (1875-1930), this journal, which published reports by missionary bishops or representatives appointed by them, is “one of the most important sources of missionary history of our time.”

## 1700s and 1800s: The Difficult Centuries

The Catholic Church and the papacy have not always had a good relationship with mass communication. The relationship between mass media and the papacy soured in the 18th century, first of all with the growth of the power of nation-states in Europe. These wanted to limit the cultural space occupied by Church schools and universities, and also to intervene more and more in the life of Christian communities, seeking to manage episcopal elections, the distribution of parishes, and the revision of Church property, and even to influence elections to the papacy.

The other very important development that created an even greater division between the Church and modernity was the 1789 French Revolution. Although its ideals of equality and participation in public affairs were at first shared by many French priests and bishops, it gradually took on a clearly anti-Christian and persecutory character. Thus its ideals of freedom of the press and expression of opinion were associated with the elimination of the “non-revolutionary” clergy, a replacement of the worship of God by the worship of the Goddess Reason, and the establishment of a national Church that dispensed with the relationship with the pope. If one adds to this the period of the Terror (1793-1794), with its series of repressions and executions against all those who were considered enemies or suspected enemies, one understands the difficulty the popes had

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<sup>4</sup> V. Hubert Jedin, edited, cit., vol. VII: 360-segg.

in seeing in the proclamation of freedoms as something good for society. Such freedoms were seen rather as a tool for anarchy and violence.

Under Napoleon Bonaparte things changed little. There were fewer executions, to be sure, but state control over the Church had become total. There was even an oath to the emperor to which all priests and bishops were subject and which was required before they could exercise their ministry. Although a Concordat between the empire and the Holy See was signed in 1801, it was betrayed by the emperor himself, who demanded the pope's total submission to his policy, using the Church against the other European powers and demanding a large number of French cardinals. Pius VII, who as a sign of détente had even gone as far to crown Bonaparte emperor in France, refused Bonaparte's demands. In 1809, French troops occupied the Papal States and arrested the pope, who was taken first to France, then to Savona, then again to France, still a prisoner of the emperor. Only with the fall of Napoleon in 1814 did the pope return to Rome.

A further important element that kept the papacy away from modernity was the so-called "Roman Question," i.e. the Papal States.

With the so-called "Donation of Sutri" in 728 the popes received as a gift territories that they had to manage in the Middle Ages, in the face of disaster, abandonment and the absence of other authorities. Subsequently, these territories—of which the pope was the sovereign to all intents and purposes—were seen as a guarantee of the pontiff's freedom, against all those who wished to influence and constrain his spiritual choices.

But the ideals of Italian national unity led to increasingly frail papal political power, until the seizure of Rome in 1870 and the unification of Italy. Pius IX, the pope of the time, who at the beginning of his pontificate, had been sympathetic to the liberal world, condemned this loss of political power (with the concomitant risk of loss of freedom), attributing it to the spirit of the French Revolution. The "Syllabus" (a list of ideas the Church opposed, published in 1864) condemned philosophies that reduced the value of Christian revelation, along with nationalism, communism, atheism, and liberalism.

The King of Italy, inspired by an anti-religious liberalism, did not only stop at the expropriation of ecclesiastical property, but went so far as to suppress religious orders, subjugating the Church more and more to the State.

In this period, with the pope constrained and immersed in Italian and European problems, there was little sensitivity to the problems and life of the missions. A sign of this is that the First Vatican Council (1868-1870), despite the presence of dozen bishops

from the missions of India, China and other nations, other than dealing with European questions, referred only to issues relating to the Eastern Churches of the Middle East.

### **The Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud***

With Leo XIII, successor to Pius IX, there was a resumption of the papacy's relationship with the modern liberal world, with industrial society, and with the world of the working class.

With Benedict XV (pope from 1914 to 1922, there was a real overcoming of Eurocentrism, as Church teaching affirmed the religious quality of the Catholic Church and its universal characteristics, being interested in the fate of humanity at all latitudes. *Maximum Illud* (1919) relaunched the Church's missionary work, supporting inculturation, the study of languages and cultures, and the growth of local clergy, warning missionaries against improper ties with Western powers.

Benedict XV also redefined Christian proclamation to be the missionary task of every baptized person and every priest and bishop, and not merely the work of a few specialists. This led to a dizzying increase in missionary assignments and an increase in mission publications and studies, with magazines, books, language dictionaries, and translations. Propaganda Fide supported all this work, relieved of responsibility for the Eastern Churches, for which the pope had founded a specific Congregation (1917).

The anti-Europeanism of *Maximum Illud* was born out of the sadness that arose in the First World War, in which European and "Christian" powers fighting each other, but also from the great experience of the Church in mission. From the end of Napoleon's empire and then increasingly throughout the 19th century, various missionary institutes (including PIME) came into being. At the same time, many traditional congregations took world mission to heart, and spread beyond Europe. In the second half of the 19th century, missions began in Oceania and Central Africa, and those in China, Vietnam and Japan expanded. The experiences of the missionaries and their scientific, naturalistic, cultural, geographical, ethnological, and archaeological discoveries were reported to the Churches of origin through annals and magazines, creating an important and valuable flow of communication.

However, it would be necessary to wait until the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), to find a reflection on the value of communications media and an appreciation for them in the life of the Church.

### *Inter Mirifica and Communio et Progressio*

Before the Council, the rejection of modernity had not led the Church to a total break with the world of communications media. On the contrary, it had created many newspapers, often strongly apologetic, which defended the pope, of Roman question, or Christian marriage. This constituted the so-called “good press.” There was also the “bad” press: liberal, anti-Catholic, anarchist, and Communist, which the faithful were enjoined not to read and which the state should stop or abolish. In addition, there was the “agnostic press,” also to be condemned because its only interest was the increase of circulation, sales and earnings, without espousing any thesis or opinion, so as not to displease any reader.

A new approach would be opened by Pope John XXIII who on January 25, 1959 announced an ecumenical council. This pope, very interested in extra-European missions—and who had worked in Propaganda Fide (from 1920 to 1924)—was convinced that the time had come to reconcile the Catholic Church with the modern world, and no longer prison to schemes and mentalities that the society of the time no longer understood. The Church therefore had to understand the world and find language, organizations, and methods to speak to the world in an understandable way, not simply by condemning errors, but by showing “the validity of the doctrine” of the Church.

The decree *Inter Mirifica* (“Among wonderful things”) is the first official document of the Catholic Church entirely dedicated to mass media.<sup>5</sup> It is very short, and among the first documents promulgated by the Council (December 4, 1963). The successor of John XXIII (who died on June 3, 1963), Paul VI, (elected June 21, 1963), gave to the Council an even more ecumenical boost and a stronger commitment to dialogue with the world. *Inter Mirifica* speaks of the media as “wonderful technical inventions” which influence individuals, multitudes of people, and the whole of society (IM, 1). The text, however, tends above all to claim their use for the Catholic Church and for the laity, and warns against the misuse that can be made of them, without dwelling on the essential value of these tools for the contemporary society and on the rights and duties of information.

To complete and correct all this, the pastoral instruction *Communio et progressio* of 1971,<sup>6</sup> was published by the Pontifical Commission for Social Communications as a

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<sup>5</sup> In truth, earlier there has been the encyclical *Vigilanti cura*, by Pius XI, dedicated to cinema (1936) and in 1957 the *Miranda Prorsus* by Pius XII, on audiovisual media. On the general value of the mass media, historians also recall a very positive speech by Pius XII at the III International Congress of the Catholic Press in Rome (1950).

<sup>6</sup> Please see:

kind of “manual” of the conciliar decree. It explores the function of the mass media in modern society and affirms the right to information and freedom of choice, which together with the freedom of communication have become elements in the common good and human rights as defended by the Church. Instead of censorship and prohibitions, pastoral instruction emphasizes education and the need for a pedagogy in the use of means. The autonomy of journalistic work is also recognized, together with the right of Catholic communities and individuals, to take part in this field. It also suggests that information must be aimed at the common good, human dignity, and objectivity. According to some historians, this instruction finally marks the abandonment of the “defensive principle” of the Church against the world and the end of the division between the “good” and “bad” press.”<sup>7</sup>

It is worth noting that the Catholic world, both before and after the Second Vatican Council, sustained a considerable number of weekly magazines, diocesan and non-diocesan papers, daily newspapers, and press agencies, not only as “apologetic” media, but also as sources of information. In the period between the two wars, under the threats of fascism, Nazism and communism, the defense of the freedom of press, considered as essential for human rights, took on more and more weight. In Europe, during the time of Fascism and Nazism, many Church papers had to close or reduce themselves to strictly religious contents but flourished again at the end of the Second World War. Similarly, publications which had closed in Eastern Europe due to Soviet policy, resumed life after the 1989 fall of Eastern Bloc communism.

It is worth mentioning that in 1927, in connection with Propaganda Fide, the International Fides Service was founded, broadcasting news from the Asian, African and Latin American missionary world in various languages.

In the field of radio broadcasting, Vatican Radio came into being in 1931, broadcasting worldwide on medium, short and ultra-short waves in about 30 languages.

In 1968, Radio Veritas Asia was established in the Philippines with German aid to the Philippine Church, producing broadcasts in the different languages of the Far East.

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[https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/pccs/documents/rc\\_pc\\_pccs\\_doc\\_23\\_051971\\_communio\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_23_051971_communio_en.html)

<sup>7</sup> M. Schmolke, quoted in AAVV. “Die Weltkirche im 20 Jahrhundert,” Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder. Vol X/1. In Jedin Hubert edited, cit. Quoted from the Italian edition. “La Chiesa nel Ventesimo secolo. 1914-1975,” vol. X/1, Milano, Jaca Book, 1980: 373.



## John Paul II

*Inter Mirifica* decree proposed of a World Day of Social Communications which was then established in 1967 by Paul VI, with the hope of making Christians more attentive and responsible in this sector of society. Since then, the popes have issued an annual message on different aspects of the situation of mass media and the moral dimension of their practice.

All this gives the impression that the Church still and only regards the media as an external “tool” to be used. It was John Paul II (1920-2005; pope from 1978 to 2005) who integrated mass media into the life of the Church itself, first and foremost through his personal testimony.

A man who made theatre at an early point in his life, Wojtyła would personally engage with journalists; in his speeches he always used “I,” not the formal “we;” he accepted questions put to him without defending himself. If we add to this his travels (104 apostolic visits outside Italy; 146 visits in Italy), and the World Youth Days, all structured as “media events,” right up to his funeral—attended by dozens of heads of state from all over the world—we can understand why television stations around the globe followed him everywhere, thereby increasing their audience. An audience was also guaranteed by the fact that on his travels Wojtyła met with everyone, rich and poor, powerful and weak; he did not hold back from defending human rights and religious freedom; he called for peace instead of war; he urged attention, fraternity, and religious sentiment; he condemned abortion, threats to family life, and the unjust exploitation of workers.

On the one hand, John Paul II made mass media true instruments of evangelization. At the same time, he saw mass media as an indispensable element of modern society.

It is worth recalling here what he says in his 1990 encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, dedicated to the permanent validity of the missionary mandate. Speaking of the new environments in which to preach the Gospel, he states:

The first Areopagus of the modern age is the world of communications, which is unifying humanity and turning it into what is known as a “global village.” The means of social communication have become so important as to be for many the chief means of information and education, of guidance and inspiration in their behavior as individuals, families and within society at large. In particular, the younger generation is growing up in a world conditioned by the mass media. To some degree perhaps this Areopagus has been neglected. Generally, preference has

been given to other means of preaching the Gospel and of Christian education, while the mass media are left to the initiative of individuals or small groups and enter into pastoral planning only in a secondary way. Involvement in the mass media, however, is not meant merely to strengthen the preaching of the Gospel. There is a deeper reality involved here: since the very evangelization of modern culture depends to a great extent on the influence of the media, it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate that message into the "new culture" created by modern communications. This is a complex issue, since the "new culture" originates not just from whatever content is eventually expressed, but from the very fact that there exist new ways of communicating, with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology. Pope Paul VI said that "the split between the Gospel and culture is undoubtedly the tragedy of our time," and the field of communications fully confirms this judgment." (RM, 37, c).

Throughout his pontificate, John Paul II was a television star. His humanity—expressed in visits and meetings, his forgiveness of his would-be assassin Ali Agca, prayer, sports, illness, death—was recorded and broadcast to a world attentive to communication through images.

He was also responsible for the beginning of the use of the internet in the Vatican Press Office and in the work of the Holy See. The image of the pope pressing the "send" button on the computer to send his 2001 Apostolic Letter *Ecclesia in Oceania* via the internet is famous.

The first Vatican publication to use the internet and online publications was precisely *Fides*, linked to Propaganda Fide. In 1998, two Chinese bishops were invited to take part in the Extraordinary Synod for Asia, Mattia Duan Yinming and Joseph Xu Zhixuan, respectively ordinary and coadjutor of the diocese of Wanxian (Sichuan). But the Beijing government forbade them to travel to Rome. *Fides* then started online publications, adding Chinese language to Italian, French, English, German, and Spanish, creating perhaps one of the first near-direct links between the Vatican and the Chinese Church.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> During the Synod on the episcopal ministry (September 30-October 27, 2001), through *Fides*, Msgr. Joseph Xu Zhixuan was able to send his speech, which was read in the Synod hall (see: [https://www.vatican.va/news\\_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino\\_20\\_x-ordinaria-2001/01\\_italiano/b20\\_01.html](https://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino_20_x-ordinaria-2001/01_italiano/b20_01.html)).

## Benedict XVI

The election of Joseph Ratzinger as pope on April 19, 2005 was judged—especially by the liberal European and German press in particular—as a “return to the Middle Ages.” His past as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, typical of the post-Council period, raised fears for the so-called progressive mentality of a return to the Inquisition. However, it only took a few months for it to become evident that Pope Benedict XVI wished to continue in the path of John Paul II in dialogue with the world and the implementation of the Second Vatican Council. Although not endowed with a charismatic aura like his predecessor, but with a soft and meek voice, Benedict forced many to change opinions with his simple style and sharp analyses, and the freedom with which he approached the questions he was asked. As his quasi-official biographer, Peter Seewald testifies,<sup>9</sup> unlike the standard procedure for interviews with politicians and public figures, the pope never wanted to see in advance the questions he would be asked. Someone said that after “the medium television” pope, came the “medium of truth” pope who expressed his beliefs, analyzed problems without hiding them, and who offered paths for research and solutions that were not pre-packaged.

In a world in which empty images and words as a screen, and which seems to drown in relativism and manipulation, this “collaboration with the truth”<sup>10</sup> is an important point in favor of communications technology.<sup>11</sup> For Benedict XVI, the mass media serve to keep the world united, by allowing people to come to know one another and find ways to express collaboration and solidarity. In his first encyclical *Deus caritas est*, n.30, he affirms:

Today the means of mass communication have made our planet smaller, rapidly narrowing the distance between different peoples and cultures. This “togetherness” at times gives rise to misunderstandings and tensions, yet our ability to know almost instantly about the needs of others challenges us to share their situation and their difficulties.

With the German pope, after the 2011 launch of the new News.va portal, Vatican communications made use of social media, including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

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<sup>9</sup> Cfr. Peter Seewald, *Benedikt XVI. Ein Leben*, 2020, Munich, Droemer Verlag, 2020. Quoted from the Italian edition, Milano: Garzanti, 2020: 924-939.

<sup>10</sup> Ratzinger’s motto as bishop.

<sup>11</sup> See: Francisco J. Perez – Latre. “Los medios, los papas y la comunicación del Vaticano entre Benedicto XVI y Francisco (2007–2017),” in *Church, Communication and Culture*, vol. 4 (2019): 61-78.

Benedict XVI also directly experienced misunderstandings and tensions with mass media: the manipulation of his Regensburg speech (September 12, 2006), which was a critique of the anti-religious positivism of the West, was dismissed as an anti-Islamic stance. Other instances included his March 17, 2009, statement that the fight against AIDS for which the use of condoms is not enough, as proven by many studies and universities; the cancellation of the excommunication of some members of the St Pius X Fraternity, including Bishop Richard Williamson, whose anti-Semitic positions were unknown to the pope (and especially to the Curia! ); the outbreak of paedophilia cases in which attempts were made to accuse Ratzinger of inaction, even though he was one of the first to react to the scourge, even before the denunciations; and the Vatileaks emergency, in which some media outlets stole confidential, though not highly sensitive, documents from the pope's secretariat and passed them off as absolute revelations.

In *Caritas in Veritate* (2009) on integral human development, Benedict XVI emphasized the importance of working in communications media with a morality inspired by human dignity. In this way, the pope taught: “The media can make an important contribution towards the growth in communion of the human family and the ethos of society when they are used to promote universal participation in the common search for what is just.” (CV, 73) A few lines earlier, he emphasized that those who stress “the strictly technical nature of the media, effectively support their subordination to economic interests intent on dominating the market and, not least, to attempts to impose cultural models that serve ideological and political agendas.” (Ibidem).

Under Benedict XVI also began the reform of the Vatican media, hitherto rather dispersed, brought together under a single central direction. The reform is still underway in the pontificate of Pope Francis, who transformed the Pontifical Council for Social Communications into a Dicastery for Communications and placed a layman as its prefect.

## **Pope Francis**

The simple and direct style of Pope Francis, elected on March 13, 2013, immediately made him into a media personality. In addition to his choices for a “poor” pontificate expressed in the sobriety of his liturgical robes, his use of a utilitarian car, or his choosing not to go on holiday, there are personal gestures—in which he meets with groups of young people, with prisoners, or with the sick, and public gestures full of symbolism. Among the latter, it is worth recalling the July 8, 2013 trip to Lampedusa to remember some migrants who drowned at sea while trying to reach Europe; the September 7, 2013 Vigil of Prayer for Peace to avert an air attack on Syria, accused of

using toxic gas; the 2016 and 2021 trips to Lesbos (Greece), to meet migrants in refugee camps and to take some of them with him to Rome.

All these gestures received worldwide coverage and made his messages on the “globalization of indifference,” on “a piecemeal third world war,” and the need for peace and coexistence between peoples, visible and concrete. With him, the proclamation of the Gospel always translates into helping to heal the wounds of the sick world, which he compares to “a field hospital.”

This is why he uses every means and agrees to be interviewed by anyone—even *Vanity Fair* in 2013 and 2021. During his pontificate, Vatican tweets have become almost daily occurrences. In 2017, he started using Instagram. By June 2020, according to Twiplomacy, Francis had 50 million Twitter followers, exceeded in number only by Donald Trump (112 million) and Narendra Modi (94 million).

Pope Francis does not lose sight of the fact that the communication sector itself is ill. In his annual messages for the World Day of Communications, he shows the limits of virtual communication, warning against forgetting reality; he urges friendship that is more than “likes;” he suggests escaping ideological or desk journalism and risking the encounter with the realities one wants to write about, because “to know one must meet” (2021); and proposes seeking to “build bridges and not walls” (Easter Message, 2019).

## Press Agencies

Precisely in order to “build bridges and not walls,” a number of missionary agencies arose in the 20th century within Propaganda Fide and its mission. They arose first and foremost from the desire to communicate to the Western world the life of the Churches in mission territories, especially in Asia. At the same time, they were to encourage the rich churches to support the proclamation of the Gospel in the poor churches. Gradually, they made better-known the life, their culture, religions, and problems of non-European peoples, becoming a source of quality information.

Built on the network of Christian missionaries and lay people in these lands, these agencies have also become an alternative or corrective source of information coming from their big international counterparts. The news sources of these missionary agencies are closer to the situations being discussed, and not tied to European or American mentalities. They are attentive to religious and cultural aspects, not just economic considerations. In this way they embody the universality of the Church – a Church which

is not only Western; in addition, they contribute to real globalization by providing cultural dialogue between East and West.

The first missionary agency was *Fides*, founded on April 4, 1927, is an unofficial voice of the Vatican, linked to Propaganda Fide. Through news and photographs, studies on the social and environmental conditions of the missions, the agency is now a center for the collection, production, and dissemination of information about the missionary world. Until 1998 it consisted of a weekly bulletin in Italian, English, French, Spanish, and German. Later it became a website to which Chinese was added, and for a short time Portuguese and Arabic too. Many journalists recognize during the Vietnam War that *Fides* was perhaps one of the few independent sources, beyond the pro-American or pro-Vietnamese information gathered in hotels in Saigon or Hanoi, informing on what was happening on the ground in Catholic and non-Catholic villages.

In 1979, *UCAN* (the Union of Catholic Asian News) agency was launched in Hong Kong, supported first by Maryknoll Missionaries, and subsequently by the Australian Jesuit province. With editions in English, Chinese, Indonesian, Korean, and Vietnamese, it grew from being a weekly bulletin to a website. For a time, it was the quasi-official voice of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). Even now, *Ucanews* is a fundamental source on the Churches of Asia.

In 1983, the *Missions Etrangères de Paris* launched *Eglises d'Asie*, first as a monthly magazine, then in the 1990s as a website. French journalists consider it a "valuable source for knowledge of Asian societies."

In 1986, PIME (the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions) founded the *AsiaNews* agency in Italy. Making use of the network of PIME missionaries and others in Asia, with an office in Hong Kong, it published a weekly bulletin of information in Italian on Churches and religions, but also on the societies, cultures, and politics of Asian countries. In 2003, it became a daily online agency with output in Italian, English, Chinese, adding Spanish in 2013, with the advent of Pope Francis.

I was editor of *AsiaNews* for 18 years, from March 2003 to May 2021. Previously I was editor of *Fides* from 1997 to 2002. I can say that while it provides timely information on the churches of Asia, *AsiaNews* is not a confessional agency. Rather, it is interested in the whole of Asia, including its politics and economics, but always with an eye to the human dimension. Among its readers are many non-Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and Tibetans. Many other news agencies, as well as international newspapers and television stations draw on this source.

In addition to providing information, the agency has often launched solidarity campaigns that have received strong support around the world. These include the campaign to free a Protestant Christian from Saudi prisons (2004); the campaign for freedom in Tibet (2008); the scholarship campaign for Chinese students (2010); supporting refugees from Mosul, Christians, Muslims, Yazidis (Iraq, 2014-2015); and the effort to free brick factory workers in Pakistan from slavery (2020-2021).

## Conclusion

When *Propaganda Fide* was founded, the Church looked upon the media—i.e. the channels of information and communication that it did not control—as an enemy and considered freedom of the press as a satanic plague. With the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, the Church has come to consider communications media as an important element of society in which it finds spaces to communicate itself and to dialogue with the world.

The missionary agencies are a discrete symbol of this dialogue with the world, capable also of helping the media to be more themselves, that is, to reflect what is happening in world society, with a focus on real people, and without becoming imprisoned by ideological or economic prejudices.

An important contribution of these agencies is to highlight the value of different religions, linked as they are to cultures. Often in mass media, religion is presented variously as an exotic curiosity, as intolerant fundamentalism or a source of terrorism, or attempts are made to erase it from the eye of the public. But religion, particularly the Catholic faith, is more often than not the source of the promotion of human dignity and a basis for social development.

Another contribution of missionary agencies is the presence of an abundant network of correspondents, both priests and lay people, who are eager to communicate their particular situations. On the contrary, because of the economic problems that afflict secular agencies especially after the 2008 crisis, more and more staff, reporters, and correspondent are being laid off and positions eliminated. As a result, journalism is reduced to a copy-and-paste from agencies or other generic sources, without journalists experiencing at first-hand what they seek to communicate.

What is characteristic of these missionary agencies is that they see the different freedoms of religion and of the press and human rights as united. In many countries, these rights are increasingly being curtailed or stifled. This sometimes puts missionary

agencies at risk of closure, either directly by political powers, or indirectly. The example of the weekly *Svet Evangelia* (The Light of the Gospel), founded in Moscow is significant. Founded in 1994 after the fall of the USSR by the Catholic Archbishop of Moscow, Mgr. Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, it was the only publication that collected testimonies from all over the former Soviet world, as far as Kazakhstan. But at Christmas 2007, under pressure from the Orthodox Patriarchate, which accused it of “proselytism” because it supported the Catholic Church’s educational, charitable and cultural activities, the new Archbishop of Moscow, Paolo Pezzi, decreed its closure.

Sometimes there are also tensions with the Vatican, in particular with the Secretariat of State. But these tensions have never resulted to closures, which would only happen in case of serious errors of faith. Instead, tensions usually occur because the Vatican Secretariat of State has to juggle religious and press freedom with real or hoped-for diplomatic relations.

**【摘要】**梵蒂岡傳信部成立於 1622 年，旨在支持天主教會在世界各地的傳教事業，一直在傳播和大眾媒體方面發揮著重要作用。它的誕生是為了支持傳教自由，免受西方列強的干擾和影響，故而常常要尋找特殊的、自由的、有活力的溝通方式。同時，它需要建立一種關係來幫助和支持傳教士，並在亞洲、非洲和拉丁美洲的邊沿國家與天主教中心之間尋找溝通工具。但天主教會和教廷並不總能與傳播界維持良好關係。在梵蒂岡第二屆大公會議（1962-1965）之前，儘管歷任教宗對媒體（報紙、廣播、電視）表示同情，但卻經常警告不要不道德地使用這些媒體，對其產品發起譴責和禁令，以捍衛道德和正統。這常常構成教會與現代世界和傳播界敵對的形象。梵二會議旨在更新教會與當代世界的接觸，尋找與世界對話及互相理解的新方式。梵示會議批准的首批文件之一是大眾工具傳播法令（1963）。到了教宗若望保祿二世時期，教會作為傳播和大眾媒體世界的參與者，媒體不僅被視為傳播福音和天主聖言的工具，也被視為在多元世界對話的環境。我們要感謝波蘭教宗在旅行、生病、甚至去世時成了電視的主角。到了教宗本篤十六世和方濟各，網絡和推特已成為教廷常用的傳播工具。傳信部與世界各地傳教區溝通的需要，促使修會和傳教會利用大眾傳媒，幫助世界了解傳教國家的政治、社會和宗教狀況，在面對自然災害、飢餓、戰爭、迫害時，促進互助友愛。一些教會媒體的例子包括亞洲新聞、亞洲教會、天亞社等。