

CCIT – Ciofliceni - Snagov 2015

INTRODUCTION

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Rather than use up valuable time required for our work by repeating Fr.Martin's greetings and words of thanks, I just want to personally thank him and his team, especially Willy, for the tremendous energy they have put into organizing this CCIT meeting. My very sincere thanks to you all!

“Communication : opportunities and dangers of the new media” is a complex theme, but also one of immediate relevance, so I am going to take the risk of surprising you by linking it to the concept of evangelization.

At the end of St.Mark's Gospel Jesus said: “Go out into the world and proclaim the Gospel to all of creation”. One can easily imagine how the concept of “evangelization” originated from such texts and how the sending out by Christ to all nations could be taken to have a military connotation and seem to be a vigorous invitation to engage in a form of proselytism (let's not mince our words!). It could be seen as an organized activity geared to gaining new converts who in turn would themselves become disciples. However, it is also possible to read this text in another way and see it as a mission to ‘proclaim’, and thereby, communicate, announcing the good news to the whole creation.

It is clear that we are no longer in the pioneering era when the first disciples had to show great courage and ingenuity in order to set in motion such an extensive program very little or no resources. They had to practically begin from zero!

Beginning by word of mouth, the Word of God spread throughout the Roman Empire from person to person...later missionaries set sail with people who wanted to discover the new world, and so, eventually the Word reached us!

Nowadays, all around us we witness the great phenomenon of communication that seems to have taken over the world, with the irresistible desire to speak, see, listen, have contact and communicate. The examples of this are varied and numerous.

Our whole way of communicating has not only changed, but it has even been transformed by the new technologies, the hyper-connection to the means of social communication (facebook, smartphones, tablets, computers, ultrafast mobile phones, e-mails, videos, blogs, twitter...). This change also has implications for evangelization. We are now faced with a new mode of evangelization, a new way of bringing the Good News to all of creation. We have to take account of these new mass media or means of social communication. We cannot just continue to do as we have always done. It is simply not good enough.

Paul VI already stated in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* that the new mass media “*put at the service of the Gospel are capable of increasing almost infinitely the area in which the Word of God is heard; they enable the Good News to reach millions of people*” (EN 45). He also said that we have the responsibility “*for reshaping with boldness and wisdom, but in complete fidelity to the content of evangelization, the means that are most suitable and effective for communicating the Gospel message to the men and women of our time*” (EN 40). And also: “*The Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means that*

human skill is daily rendering more perfect. It is through them that she proclaims "from the housetops" the message of which she is the depository (EN 45). Benedict XVI says: *"If the Good News is not made known also in the numerical environment it could remain absent from the experience of the great numbers of people for whom that existential space is so important"*. Thus the missionary importance of the new means of social communications.

We cannot just wait around for people to come to us. Rather it is up to us to go look for them in the places they frequent, like Facebook, blogs etc. Many of the people who use the Net are often those who have no contact with the Church or who are totally indifferent to religion! They are people whom we certainly never see at the Church and will only ever hear of God through those channels.

That is how new forms of interpersonal relations begin. The internet puts us in relationship with people whom we would otherwise never have met.

More and more we see young Hungarian gypsies using these means to communicate with each other....and one can see appearing on Facebook entire passages of the Bible or the Gospels, videos of prayer-meetings that they have animated, Masses in which they have participated. They provide information to Travelers about the days and the times of prayer..."Catholic Traveling People", "Young Catholic Travelers" in France, "Katolische Fahrenden Volkes" in Switzerland. These are some of the items with which I am familiar. The youth are evangelizing each other, but they only talk about things that interest them!

There are risks involved of course. The Gospel is not a ready-made product that can be presented as a packet or as a "kit ready for use". It can, actually, quite easily become a stereotyped and disincarnate message, reduced to a list of biblical references and stock phrases. The Word of God is a living word, it needs to be heard, and it requires a genuine relationship. It has to be communicated from person to person. This involves paying attention to the other person, to their history and real needs.

Paul VI reminds us: *"the first means of evangelization is the witness of an authentically Christian life"* (EN 41). Remember the two disciples who heard John the Baptist say *"Here is the Lamb of God"*. *The two disciples followed Jesus: "Jesus turned to them and asked: "What do you want?" and they replied: "Where do you live"? And He said to them: "come and you will see"*.

There we have the true lesson of communication that is lived. Such is the vocation of CCIT: to communicate by the way of living, sharing of experiences and in its own particular style, *"announcing the Good News to all people"*.

By way of conclusion, I cannot resist the pleasure of relying on what our present Pope proposes: *"The Church needs to be concerned for and present in, the world of communication, in order to dialogue with people today and to help them encounter Christ. She needs to be a Church at the side of others, capable of accompanying everyone along the way. The revolution taking place in communications media and in information technologies represents a great and thrilling challenge; may we respond to that challenge with fresh energy and imagination as we seek to share with others the beauty of God"*. (Message of Pope Francis for the 48th World Communications Day, 23 Jan. 2014). During these days let us look for ways of taking up this challenge. Our speakers will surely invite us to do that. I wish you all a good meeting.