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Radio and the Church – a Historical Glance

Abstract

Radio is a very powerful mass communication medium. In radio broadcasting, one can hear the echo of Christ's words to his apostles in the missionary discourse: "You received without charge, give without charge...What you hear in whispers, proclaim from the house tops" (Mt 10,8b.27). Although the Church uses radio as a means to transmit the Good News of salvation, and we as human beings receive radio transmissions as a part of our daily life, we barely stop to think and reflect upon the underlying aspects of radio as a means of communication. In this paper, the Author endeavours to give a historical overview of what makes radio an important medium for evangelisation according to four key documents of the Church, while also studying the underlying theological positions found in these documents. These documents enable us to study radio as a broadcasting medium, highlighting the possible reactions of the Church to radio and how the Church changed its stance on radio over the years. The reason for focussing specifically on radio is for two particular reasons: from the very beginning, the Church has considered radio as a means for evangelising the masses. Notwithstanding this, what is going to be discussing in the paper can be equally applied to Television as a mass communication medium. Secondly, the Church took an active role in radio broadcasting by asking Guglielmo Marconi himself to construct the Vatican Radio in 1931. The documents of the Church also offer us a theology of radio as a mass communication medium, with unity, progress and evangelisation being the fundamental aspects. Church documents posit that not everything should be broadcasted over radio but only messages which bring about peace and unity.

Keywords

Radio, evangelisation, Church, mass communication, Church documents.

1. Introduction

The attitude of the Church towards radio and the possible use of this medium for evangelisation has changed throughout the decades. The term ‘evangelisation’ must not be interpreted strictly as evangelisation *ad gentes*, that is, to those who do not know Christ. It entails the entire mission of the Church: promoting human dignity and interaction, sustaining and enhancing unity among different people and nations, and the transmission of liturgical celebrations to those who are physically impaired from participating. A study of the teachings of the Church on radio as a means of mass communication reveals this. The attitude of the Church towards radio is also found, though to a lesser extent, in the institutions that the Church has set up. The establishment of radio broadcasting facilities (12th February 1931) together with the setting up of the Pontifical Council for Social Communication (30th January 1948), show the particular interest of the Church in this mass communication medium, as well as a move towards the establishment of a centralised policy for the use of radio by the Church.

This article endeavours to trace the way in which the Church has looked at radio as a communication medium through a study of some of the most important documents of the Church on the subject. Four particular documents which are most relevant to the subject matter will be considered:

- a. The Encyclical Letter *Miranda Prorsus* (8th September 1957)¹;
- b. The Decree of Vatican Council II *Inter Mirifica* (4th December 1963)²;
- c. The Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio* (23rd May 1971)³;
- d. The Pastoral Instruction *Aetatis Novae* (22nd February 1992)⁴.

¹ Cfr Pope Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Miranda Prorsus* (8th September 1965): http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_08091957_miranda-prorsus_en.html (01.10.2013).

² Cfr Vatican Council II, Conciliar Decree *Inter Mirifica* (4th December 1963): http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19631204_inter-mirifica_en.html (01.10.2013).

³ Cfr Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio* (23rd May 1971): http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_23051971_communio_en.html (01.10.2013).

⁴ Cfr Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Pastoral Instruction *Aetatis Novae* (22nd February 1992): http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_22021992_aetatis_en.html (01.10.2013).

Occasionally other documents will be referred to as well. These will help us to understand the theme being focussed upon better.

The contents of these documents can be treated in several ways. In order to be able to trace the development in the outlook of the Church towards radio as a means of social communication, it would be best to adopt a systematic analysis of the Magisterial documents and papal pronouncements. This gives us the possibility to note the progress, or otherwise, in the teaching of the Church.

Before treating the specific topics dealt with in the documents of the Church it would be better if one had a bird's eye view of the contents and of the novelties which are found in each of these four major documents. One must also consider the milieu in which these documents were written.

1.1. *Miranda Prorsus*

The Encyclical Letter *Miranda Prorsus*, published on the 8th September 1957 by Pope Pius XI is the second Encyclical Letter in the 20th century dealing with the media of social communication. The first one was *Vigilanti Cura*, dealing with the motion pictures⁵. *Miranda Prorsus* speaks about all the broadcasting media. It highlights the interest of the Church in the area of social communication and is characterised by its highly analytic content, by its positive outlook towards the media, by the positive potential uses of these media and by the new pastoral needs which arise out of their existence. The greatest value of the Encyclical Letter lies in the outward looking vision which the Church adopts and in the analysis of the effects of the electronic media and the new pastoral measures which need to be adopted as a result of their existence⁶.

1.2. *Inter Mirifica*

The Conciliar Decree *Inter Mirifica* treating the Media of Social Communications was the second Decree to be promulgated out of the 16 Constitutions and Decrees of Vatican Council II. It followed the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, both approved on the session held on the 4th December 1963. It was the first time in the history of the Church that an Ecumenical Council discussed social communications and published

⁵ Cfr Pope Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Vigilanti Cura* (29th June 1936): http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_29061936_vigilanti-cura_en.html (01.10.2013).

⁶ Cfr F.-J. Eilers, R. Giannatelli, *Chiesa e comunicazione sociale. I documenti fondamentali*, Leumann (To) 1996, Elledici, p. 27–28.

a Conciliar Decree. This may be one of the reasons why the document treats the subject matter in a general way. *Inter Mirifica* introduced new terminology to refer to the broadcasting media. They were referred to as means of ‘social communication’. This phrase encompasses both the idea of communication among human beings and communication through the mass media to large numbers of people simultaneously⁷.

A positive development brought about by *Inter Mirifica* was the awareness of the importance that should be given to professional training for all those who are engaged in the media of social communication, both priests and lay people⁸.

1.3. *Communio et Progressio*

The Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio* was published on the 23rd May 1971 according to the directions of the Conciliar Decree *Inter Mirifica*. The final document is a result of the work of a number of professionals in the field of social communication who formed part of the Pontifical Commission for Social Communications. *Communio et Progressio* is one of the most positive documents of the Church on social communication dealing mainly with the way in which the media help in human progress⁹. From the theological point of view *Communio et Progressio* surpasses the other documents on social communication in that it discusses new theological reflections which in themselves could become the subjects for further discussions: Christ is considered as the perfect communicator, and the Eucharist as that sacrament which is a form of communication leading to communion. The role of the Holy Spirit and the Trinitarian dimension of Christian communication are also outlined. It can be considered as the ‘Magna Carta’ of Catholic communication which is characterised by its positive approach to the subject matter in a professional and concrete way¹⁰.

1.4. *Aetatis Novae*

The rapid revolution in the mass media impelled the Pontifical Council for Social Communications to publish yet another Pastoral Instruction: *Aetatis Novae* in 1992. The aim of this document was to reflect on the pastoral

⁷ Cfr Eilers, R. Giannatelli, *Chiesa e comunicazione sociale. I documenti fondamentali*, p. 60–61.

⁸ Cfr Eilers, R. Giannatelli, *Chiesa e comunicazione sociale. I documenti fondamentali*, p. 62.

⁹ Cfr Eilers, R. Giannatelli, *Chiesa e comunicazione sociale. I documenti fondamentali*, p. 74.

¹⁰ Cfr Eilers, R. Giannatelli, *Chiesa e comunicazione sociale. I documenti fondamentali*, p. 74.

implications of the ‘technological inventions’ which by the time had “become so important as to be for many the chief means of information and education, of guidance and inspiration in their behaviour as individuals, families and within society at large”¹¹. In *Aetatis Novae*, the Pontifical Council for Social Communication seeks to encourage those who are faced with new pastoral challenges due to the newly emerging realities¹². *Aetatis Novae* re-affirms all the means of social communication, referring to “folk media and other traditional forms of expression”¹³ because in some circumstances these can be more effective in spreading the Gospel than the broadcasting media¹⁴. *Aetatis Novae* does not refer to the internet in any way because at the time in which the document was promulgated, Internet was only in its embryonic stage.

Aetatis Novae speaks of the training which is necessary for both priests and for lay people, who work in the field of social communication. The Instruction claims that all those engaged in using the instruments of social communication to transmit the Good News should have a sound doctrinal and spiritual formation together with a professional education on how to use the means of social communication to impart a message to all categories of people¹⁵. This is a form of pastoral care to those engaged in the media of social communication, who need to be supported because they are usually exposed ‘to moral challenges’ in their work¹⁶.

2. Radio as broadcasting medium

James McDonnell says that the Church has reacted to the innovations and to the new world view brought about by the media in three distinct ways. The Church has answered to these three ‘threats’ either by *assimilation*, or by *rejection* or by *accommodation*¹⁷.

¹¹ *Aetatis Novae*, para. 1.

¹² Cfr *Aetatis Novae*, para. 1.

¹³ *Aetatis Novae*, para. 16.

¹⁴ Cfr Eilers, R. Giannatelli, *Chiesa e comunicazione sociale. I documenti fondamentali*, p. 133–134; *Aetatis Novae*, para. 16.

¹⁵ Cfr *Aetatis Novae*, para. 18.

¹⁶ Cfr *Aetatis Novae*, para. 19.

¹⁷ Cfr J. McDonnell, *Communicating the Gospel in a Technological Age: Rediscovering the Contemplative Spirit*, in: J. McDonnell, F. Trampietti (eds.), *Communicating Faith in a Technological*

Assimilation occurs when somebody now feels comfortable and well about something which was primarily considered as a threat. In the Church related context this occurs when “the electronic evangelist accepts the values of the world of commercial broadcasting and concentrates on producing slick ‘professional’ products for precisely targeted audiences”¹⁸. This may mean that one uses false prophets to assure himself of large profits¹⁹. This is not the way in which the Church should treat and utilise these modern technological discoveries. We need to distinguish between what technology can actually achieve through inventions, in terms of the revenues generated by these inventions, and numbers in terms of audiences on the one hand, and the moral values which are associated with the use of radio as a medium for mass communication, and the values which can be transmitted through radio on the other. This balance can be achieved by monitoring what is constantly being transmitted through radio and the intentions for such transmissions. If the intentions and objectives are not in line with the mission of the Church for evangelisation in the broad sense, then not everything can be transmitted over the radio.

William F. Fore also speaks of *assimilation*, but in terms of ‘Christ of Culture’. Fore borrows the phrase ‘Christ of Culture’ from Helmut Richard Niebuhr.²⁰ In this context, ‘Christ of Culture’ refers to the process in which the Christian considers history as the process in which the Spirit of Christ is active and present without any discernment about whether the spirit found in history is truly Christian or otherwise²¹. “This ‘Christ of Culture’ response is the impetus behind the Electronic Church, a position which in the guise of rejecting the values of secular culture actually embraces them”²².

Age, Slough 1989, Morehouse Publishing, p. 14–18.

¹⁸ J. McDonnell, *Communicating the Gospel in a Technological Age: Rediscovering the Contemplative Spirit*, p. 15.

¹⁹ Cfr J. McDonnell, *Communicating the Gospel in a Technological Age: Rediscovering the Contemplative Spirit*, p. 15.

²⁰ Cfr H. R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, New York 1951, Harper One. In this book, Niebuhr speaks of five possible relationships which the Christian can have with culture: Christ against culture, Christ of culture, Christ above culture, Christ and culture in paradox, and Christ transforming culture.

²¹ Cfr H. R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, p. 83–115.

²² W. F. Fore, *Communication and religion in the technological Era*, in: M. Traber (ed.), *The Myth of the Information Revolution. Social and Ethical Implications of Communication Technology*, London 1986, SAGE Publications, p. 133.

The Church has also tried to censor these technological innovations or to *reject* them completely. This has been evident in the way in which the Church, or Church-related circles have sometimes expressed their dislike to the new media of mass communication. This was characteristic of the Church at the early stages of development of the new media, including radio. We may recall the controversy of whether the celebration of the Eucharist and other sacred celebrations should be transmitted over the radio. In this respect, we see a positive shift in the way in which the Church considers this issue, from barring the transmission of the Eucharistic Celebration over the radio waves to allowing it. There are three short pronouncements dealing with this issue pertaining to the pontificate of Pope Pius XI which resolve the issue in a negative way: they do not give permission for Liturgical celebrations to be broadcast using radio²³.

On the 23rd December 1926 the Archbishop of Prague wrote a letter to the Holy See asking whether he could use radio to transmit the Celebration of the Mass²⁴. The answer to this letter was “that the Holy Father is totally against the use of radio in churches, whether for the Mass, or for preaching or for other religious ceremonies. This is not allowed for any reason whatsoever”²⁵. In another document quoted by Baragli the reason for this is explained: if the celebration of the Eucharist and other sacred rites were broadcast through radio they could end in hostile places where such sacred celebrations were mocked and ridiculed by non-believers²⁶.

This attitude was re-iterated in a document published in March 1928, where the Pope claims that those who were using radio to transmit sacred celebrations were doing so without the permission of the Holy See. Nobody had this permission except the National Radio of Salamanca. The Holy Father had granted this radio station the permission to broadcast the Mass only from the chapel situated within the premises of the radio station because this was to the advantage of those who could not go to Mass for some just reason. However, the Pope also remarked that this form of celebration was not sufficient to fulfil the precept of going to Mass on Sundays and feast days²⁷.

²³ Cfr E. Baragli, *Comunicazione Comunione e Chiesa*, Roma 1973, Studio Romano della Comunicazione Sociale, p. 451–452, 459–460, 510.

²⁴ Cfr E. Baragli, *Comunicazione Comunione e Chiesa*, p. 452.

²⁵ E. Baragli, *Comunicazione Comunione e Chiesa*, p. 451–452.

²⁶ Cfr E. Baragli, *Comunicazione Comunione e Chiesa*, p. 510.

²⁷ Cfr E. Baragli, *Comunicazione Comunione e Chiesa*, p. 459–460.

In the present situation, both McDonnell and Fore declare that the best way for the Church seems to be in providing an alternative environment for the mass media to work in²⁸. McDonnell says that this has been achieved to a considerable extent through *accommodation* to these new technologies²⁹. Fore does not use the term ‘*accommodation*’ but he uses the phrase ‘*creative transformation*’. Fore, also borrows this term from Helmut Richard Niebuhr, who speaks of Christ transforming culture. By this Niebuhr is considering the relationship of those Christians who see God’s action in the world and the Christian’s response to God’s call. This is a dynamic process which is constantly transforming the world.³⁰ William Fore considers this as the best way for the Church to interact with the contemporary era: by challenging it through creative transformation³¹. This can be achieved by trying to “relate the requirements of historical Christian faith to the current cultural and media reality”³².

Fore claims that in this approach the Church acknowledges the power of the mass media in general, and tries to make the best use of them to transmit the Good News³³. While *Miranda Prorsus* acknowledges the limitations of radio over the scenic properties of the cinema and television, it claims that radio, like all other means of mass communication is not restricted by time and place. Moreover, it is able to transgress all frontiers in a very swift manner. “Though it is not endowed to anything like the same extent with scenic properties and other advantages of time and place, as is the cinema industry, sound radio has yet other advantages, not all of which have yet been exploited. For, as We said to the members and directors of a broadcasting company, ‘this method of communication is such that it is, as it were, detached from and unrestricted by conditions of place and time which block or delay all other methods of communication between men. On a kind of winged flight much swifter than

²⁸ Cfr W. F. Fore, *Communication and religion in the technological Era*, p. 134–137; J. McDonnell, *Communicating the Gospel in a Technological Age: Rediscovering the Contemplative Spirit*, p. 16–18.

²⁹ Cfr J. McDonnell, *Communicating the Gospel in a Technological Age: Rediscovering the Contemplative Spirit*, p. 16–18.

³⁰ Cfr. H. R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, p. 190–229.

³¹ Cfr W. F. Fore, *Communication and religion in the technological Era*, p. 134–137.

³² W. F. Fore, *Communication and religion in the technological Era*, p. 134.

³³ Cfr W. F. Fore, *Communication and religion in the technological Era*, p. 134.

sound waves, with the speed of light, it passes in a moment over all frontiers, and delivers the news committed to it”³⁴.

This gives radio the capability of enlightening and instructing humanity in an unhindered and nearly limitless way. In this respect, *Communio et Progressio* claims that through the rapid technological advances the media have freed themselves from restrictions of time and space³⁵ while stretching out all news and information to every corner of the earth. ‘Live’ transmissions break through all political and cultural frontiers reaching all human beings in the comfort of their homes³⁶. However, we should not limit the potential of radio only to the fact that it can transgress the limitations of space. Radio has yet another potential which truly has the power to bring about the creative transformation of the world. This is the ability to foster unity among nations. This is something which can be achieved through well-organised radio programming aimed at fostering communion among nations and amongst people with different cultural backgrounds living in close proximity to each other.³⁷ This is also at the basis of the theology of radio as a mass communication medium which will be discussed later.

Miranda Prorsus expounds on another advantage of radio: radio helps those who are physically impeded from taking part in ecclesial life due to old age or sickness to take part, in some form or another, through prayers and the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, even at a distance³⁸. *Communio et Progressio* also sees this as an advantage of radio over the other broadcasting media. Religious programmes act as “bonds of union for those who cannot share physically in the life of the Church because of their sickness or old age”³⁹.

The modern communication techniques are offering us more interesting and effective ways with which to confront the listeners with the Gospel Message. Radio offers the possibility of transmitting human and Christian values with excessive ease, thus demonstrating new ways in which the Christian can endorse and live these values in our contemporary time.

³⁴ Cfr *Miranda Prorsus*, part 3. Unlike the modern Church Documents, *Miranda Prorsus* is not numbered in paragraphs but in parts. This makes it very difficult to cite small parts. As a result, I am using the internal numbering of the parts within the document itself.

³⁵ Cfr *Communio et Progressio*, para. 20.

³⁶ Cfr *Communio et Progressio*, para. 148.

³⁷ Cfr *Communio et Progressio*, para. 8–11, 18.

³⁸ Cfr *Miranda Prorsus*, part 3.

³⁹ *Communio et Progressio*, para. 150.

Communio et Progressio argues that the Church cannot neglect these new emerging opportunities. On the contrary, the Church must constantly make use of the most appropriate technique and style. Moreover, in those places where the Church cannot run broadcasting facilities, *Communio et Progressio* urges the Local Church to make use of the means of social communication which belong to other entities⁴⁰. The reason for this is that the means of social communications are good in themselves.

3. The Theology of Radio as a Mass Communication Medium

The theology of radio as a broadcasting medium is multi-faceted. The dominant theological aspect which emerges from the documents of the Church is that radio is a gift of God which has the potential of being a source of progress and unity⁴¹. Unity and progress among human beings is the major reason for which radio as a communication medium has a place in God's plan of salvation. Moreover, the progress and unity which radio is capable of bringing about is more the result of its intrinsic nature than of its use. Radio has a value in itself as a broadcasting medium. This value is independent of how radio is used, although it becomes more evident when it is used in a good way. When radio is used to foster unity and progress, the human being becomes a co-creator with God and radio becomes an instrument which can be used for evangelisation in a broad sense.

The idea of the means of social communication fostering unity and progress in the world is first met, although in a very limited and indirect way in *Miranda Prorsus*⁴² and in *Inter Mirifica*⁴³. This idea was brought to the foreground and thoroughly explored in *Communio et Progressio*⁴⁴. *Aetatis Novae* continues on the footsteps of *Communio et Progressio*⁴⁵.

In *Miranda Prorsus* and *Inter Mirifica* we have a perspective in which the Church was already perceiving the potential of the unity and harmony

⁴⁰ Cfr *Communio et Progressio*, para. 131–132.

⁴¹ Cfr *Communio et Progressio*, para. 1; *Aetatis Novae*, para. 7–8.

⁴² Cfr *Miranda Prorsus*, part 1.

⁴³ Cfr *Inter Mirifica*, para. 5.

⁴⁴ Cfr *Communio et Progressio*, para. 6–18.

⁴⁵ Cfr *Aetatis Novae*, para. 6–10.

which the means of social communication could bring about. However, this was tainted by suspicion because radio could reach the multitudes with the probability of disseminating evil ideas⁴⁶. *Miranda Prorsus* points out that when radio fulfils its function as being at the service of what is true, it acts as a catalyst in forming closer bonds between different people, thus helping them to respect and understand each other better and assist each other in times of difficulty. In practice, this implies not only refraining from the use of deceptive information but that errors or anything else which can encourage a false or harmful life-style are to be avoided. It is in this way that radio can actually serve in perfecting human life and virtues⁴⁷. *Inter Mirifica* laid the foundations of what was elaborated more thoroughly and exhaustively in *Communio et Progressio*. *Inter Mirifica* claims that: “The first question has to do with ‘information’, as it is called, or the search for and reporting of the news. Now clearly this has become most useful and very often necessary for the progress of contemporary society and for achieving closer links among men. The prompt publication of affairs and events provides every individual with a fuller, continuing acquaintance with them, and thus all can contribute more effectively to the common good and more readily promote and advance the welfare of the entire civil society”⁴⁸.

This concept was re-iterated more emphatically in *Communio et Progressio* which states that news and information are aimed at the achievement of progress and in uniting people together in a universal brotherhood⁴⁹. However, to achieve this, one condition must be satisfied: “[E]very communication must comply with certain essential requirements and these are sincerity, honesty and truthfulness. Good intentions and a clear conscience do not thereby make a communication sound and reliable. A communication must state the truth”⁵⁰. With *Communio et Progressio* the idea that the means of social communication are to be viewed as ‘gifts of God’ emerges.⁵¹ Here we have a significant shift in the attitude of the Church towards the instruments of social communication. With the publication of *Communio et Progressio*,

⁴⁶ Cfr *Miranda Prorsus*, part 1; *Inter Mirifica*, para. 3–12.

⁴⁷ Cfr *Miranda Prorsus*, part 1.

⁴⁸ *Inter Mirifica*, para. 5.

⁴⁹ Cfr *Communio et Progressio*, para. 1.

⁵⁰ *Communio et Progressio*, para. 17.

⁵¹ Cfr *Communio et Progressio*, para. 1–2.

the Church seems to have overcome the initial difficulty about the moral evil which could result from disseminating false or imprecise information. With accumulated experience in the use of radio, it became evident that the information being transmitted was no longer the major problem for the Church. *Communio et Progressio* considered radio as an instrument which could be used to foster unity among all human beings in itself⁵².

Communio et Progressio suggests that when the Catholic point of view is introduced into programs broadcast on radio, a new catalyst for unity within the Church itself is created. Truly balanced viewpoints enhance dialogue within the members of the ecclesial community no matter how far they are from each other⁵³. However, one must keep in mind that unity and communion are tied to the nature more than to the actual content broadcast over radio. *Aetatis Novae* not only speaks of unity in a generic sense but further explicates what type of unity is intended: a unity leading to communion. The Pastoral Instruction goes even further and states that all communication is a reflection of the “Church’s own communion and is capable of contributing to it”⁵⁴. Through communicating, the Church not only fosters communion amongst the members of the believing community itself, uniting them together but it also helps in creating the necessary environment to create a more solid communion between individuals and the Church itself. This results in the creation of stronger bonds between human beings based on the strong bonds that exist between the three Persons forming the Trinity⁵⁵.

The means of social communication tend to multiply relations between human beings. At the core of the faith, we find that all human beings are called to communicate with each other in order to live in unity and in harmony especially through the discovery and good use of the gifts of God. In *Miranda Prorsus* the human being was considered as a co-creator with God in using radio as a communication medium to communicate the Good News to other people⁵⁶. *Communio et Progressio* continues on the same lines and the human being is seen as co-operating with God in his creation by using radio to foster unity and communion in the world, thus rendering it more

⁵² Cfr *Miranda Prorsus*, part 1; *Inter Mirifica*, para. 1–2.

⁵³ Cfr *Communio et Progressio*, para. 102–103.

⁵⁴ *Aetatis Novae*, para. 6.

⁵⁵ Cfr *Communio et Progressio*, para. 8.

⁵⁶ Cfr *Miranda Prorsus*, part 1.

just and humane⁵⁷. The means of social communication help the fostering of unity and harmony, bringing together human beings from different cultures and nations, and uniting them. The model and the source of inspiration of all human communication remains the perfect communion and communication between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, making them One God, having a single divine life.

The Catholic vision of radio as a mass communication medium as postulated by *Communio et Progressio* points out that the effectiveness of radio in fostering unity and harmony is estimated in as much as it contributes to the building up of new relationships between individuals and between nations, and as long as they sustain already existing relationships through justice and peace. Radio must help in the search for the truth through peace and justice leading to the progress of humanity as a whole and to communion among men and women⁵⁸. This can be achieved in a practical way through the news, the information and the programs transmitted over the radio.

The Church is particularly concerned with radio as a mass communication medium because of its potential of reaching a multitude of people simultaneously. This makes it possible to convey news, information and thoughts, providing food for thought at any moment of life. *Miranda Prorsus* claims that radio can be a very powerful contributor in the right formation of our contemporary society⁵⁹. However, to stop here one will only have a partial view. *Miranda Prorsus* acknowledges that radio can act in a dual way because it can either be a source of light and knowledge which places human beings in a better position or a source of corruption and evil by disseminating false ideas, making human beings subjects of their passions⁶⁰. This depends on the programs which are presented on radio, and whether they are elevating or debasing: “unless the mounting development of technical skill, applied to the diffusion of pictures, sounds and ideas, is subjected to the sweet yoke of Christ, it can be a source of countless evils”⁶¹. However, one can never claim that any evil deed or effect is originating from God who is the One and Only Absolute Good; nor can it be ascribed to

⁵⁷ Cfr *Communio et Progressio*, para. 7.

⁵⁸ Cfr *Communio et Progressio*, para. 12.

⁵⁹ Cfr *Miranda Prorsus*, part 1.

⁶⁰ Cfr *Miranda Prorsus*, part 1.

⁶¹ *Miranda Prorsus*, part 1.

the technological inventions themselves. The problem lies in human beings who are free and can abuse in the use of the gifts over which God has made them stewards. The consequence of this will be the regeneration of evil in the world⁶².

Aetatis Novae points out that while radio can be a very effective instrument in achieving unity, it can also be used to spread a negative and unreal outlook on life and on institutions such as the family and religion. When this happens it will not be acting at the service of the human being⁶³. When radio is abused of, it produces the opposite of what it is supposed to be doing⁶⁴. In a document on *Pornography and Violence in the Communications Media*, we find that when the minds and hearts of those who operate radio as a means of social communication are ill disposed they produce a counter-effect leading to disunity and discord, thus regenerating evil instead of reducing it⁶⁵. This is mostly evident when radio is “used to contradict or corrupt the fundamental values of human life”⁶⁶.

One of the reasons for the interest of the Church in radio and the other new media is a result of the Church’s interest in the well-being of the human being. *Miranda Prorsus* says that these novel forms of communication are capable of exerting a strong influence on the way of thinking and on the way of acting, of both individuals and of groups of people alike. The soundest reason for the interest of the Catholic Church in the new media as outlined in *Miranda Prorsus* is that above all the other entities, the Church claims to have a message which leads to the eternal salvation of humanity. This is ultimately the message which all men and women, no matter from which race they are coming, need to accept and to embrace⁶⁷. Although in *Miranda Prorsus* Pope Pius XII never explicitly mentions that the Church has the final word, *Communio et Progressio* and *Aetatis Novae* clearly state that the Church does not claim to have the final words⁶⁸. The Church has always treated the

⁶² Cfr *Miranda Prorsus*, part 1.

⁶³ Cfr *Aetatis Novae*, para. 7.

⁶⁴ Cfr *Communio et Progressio*, para. 9; *Ethics in Communications*, para. 1, 4, 6–19.

⁶⁵ Cfr Pontifical Council Social Communication, *Pornography and Violence in the Communications Media* (7th May 1989): http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_07051989_pornography_en.html (20.10.2013), para. 7.

⁶⁶ *Communio et Progressio*, para. 9.

⁶⁷ Cfr *Miranda Prorsus*, part 1.

⁶⁸ Cfr *Communio et Progressio*, para. 186; *Aetatis Novae*, para. 1.

means of social communication and their developments with urgency so that salvation will be readily made accessible to all humankind⁶⁹. “It is, in fact, urgently necessary to make provision that in this field also the progress of the arts, of the sciences, and of human technique and industry, since they are all true gifts of God, may be ordained to His glory and to the salvation of souls and may be made to serve in a practical way to promote the extension of the Kingdom of God upon earth. Thus, as the Church bids us pray, we may all profit by them but in such a manner as not to lose the goods eternal”⁷⁰. This ultimately results in the re-calling of the human being to seek the perfection of his soul and in this way promote God’s glory.

Humanity is constantly being called to share the gifts of God with others in such a way that these contribute to the strengthening and the perfecting of our human nature. *Miranda Prorsus* calls all true and active Catholics to “ensure, to the extent of their power, that the Church may be free to use these technical discoveries in so far as they may assist the sanctification of souls”⁷¹. The duty of the Church in assisting the sanctification of souls by using the means of social communication is also repeated in subsequent documents⁷².

In *Aetatis Novae*, radio as a means of social communication was still perceived as having a dual function. However, here, the distinction is more subtle. It is not simply seen as a medium through which morally good or morally evil ideas can be broadcast. It is also a medium which can be used for evangelisation: radio “can be used to proclaim the Gospel or to reduce it to silence in human hearts”⁷³. Consequently, *Aetatis Novae* maintains that as some issues and some people may be actually reduced to silence because the media ignore them, so can the ‘voice of the Good News’ be silenced in the same way; a thing which can never be accepted by believers⁷⁴.

⁶⁹ Cfr *Miranda Prorsus*, introduction; *Inter Mirifica*, para. 1; *Communio et Progressio*, para. 1–2, 134; *Aetatis Novae*, para 1–3.

⁷⁰ *Vigilanti Cura*, part 1. Unlike the modern Church Documents, *Vigilanti Cura* is not numbered in paragraphs but in parts. This makes it very difficult to cite small parts. As a result, I am using the internal numbering of the parts within the document itself.

⁷¹ *Miranda Prorsus*, part 1.

⁷² Cfr *Inter Mirifica*, para. 22; *Communio et Progressio*, para. 2, 125; *Aetatis Novae*, para. 22.

⁷³ *Aetatis Novae*, para. 4.

⁷⁴ Cfr *Aetatis Novae*, para. 4.

Radio as a means of social communication plays yet another important role in the life of the Church: it can help in fostering dialogue between the Church and the world with the aim being to help the recipients to get a true and balanced idea of the real life of the Church⁷⁵. This can be applied in a special way in the ecumenical area where joint efforts may be used to present programmes using radio⁷⁶. *Aetatis Novae* maintains that the message which the Church is broadcasting through radio is one of liberation and a continuous witness to justice and solidarity among the nations. It is only when this is achieved that we can claim that radio is being used to enhance the life of the human being in an integral way⁷⁷.

All the four documents we are analysing start from the premise that radio as a mass communication medium is a gift which God has given to human beings so that they may use it for their own good and for the good of others⁷⁸. *Miranda Prorsus* besides acknowledging that God is the Supreme Good from Whom all good gifts emerge also praises human intelligence that was able to discover these means of social communication. Some of the gifts discovered by the human being are related to the material life while others are related to their spiritual well-being⁷⁹. In his infinite goodness God willed that human beings fulfil their identity as being created in the image of His perfection by assisting God in communicating His message through human means⁸⁰. Therefore, the human being is the steward of “these useful instruments by which the priceless treasures of God may be spread among men like good seed which brings forth fruits of truth and goodness”⁸¹.

⁷⁵ Cfr *Communio et Progressio*, para. 122–125; *Aetatis Novae*, para. 8; Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Ethics in Communication* (4th June 2000): http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_20000530_ethics-communications_en.html (15.10.2013), para. 11.

⁷⁶ Cfr Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Directory for the Application of the Principles of Ecumenism* (25th March 1993): http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/general-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19930325_directory_en.html (20.10.2013), para. 217.

⁷⁷ Cfr *Aetatis Novae*, para. 9.

⁷⁸ Cfr *Miranda Prorsus*, part 1; *Inter Mirifica*, para. 1; *Communio et Progressio*, para. 2; *Aetatis Novae*, para. 22.

⁷⁹ Cfr *Miranda Prorsus*, part 1.

⁸⁰ Cfr *Miranda Prorsus*, part 1.

⁸¹ *Miranda Prorsus*, part 1.

4. Conclusion

The way in which the Church has considered radio as a mass communication medium has clearly changed over time in the past. While the Church has always remained steadfast in the idea that radio can be used for evangelisation because it can reach the multitudes simultaneously, this cannot be said for radio as a means to promote unity and progress. In *Miranda Prorsus* and *Inter Mirifica*, the focus was on transmitting good as opposed to bad or evil information, thus making radio a good medium promoting unity or otherwise according to what is being broadcast. In *Communio et Progressio* and *Aetatis Novae*, we see a definite shift towards radio being an instrument to promote unity and harmony in itself, irrespective of what is transmitted over it.

The Church has always considered radio as a gift of God, thus endowed with inherent goodness. In the documents which the Church has promulgated about the mass communication media, we find a particular theology of radio as a broadcasting medium. This theology emphasises the unity and the progress which can be achieved when radio is used in good faith, with positive intentions and good programs. This makes radio an instrument which can be used for evangelisation, an instrument through which the Good News can reach the multitudes.

The foundation of the Church by Jesus Christ was to bear God's salvation to all humanity. This is the heart of the mission of the Church. The special interest which the Church has in radio as a mass communication medium, in part shows how much this mission is still at heart and how much the Church is constantly trying to fulfil this mission in the contemporary world. The Church still feels the need to announce the Good News through radio as a means of social communication.

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