

Darwin, Catholic Media and the Confusion of the Species

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Shakespeare almost had it right when he said, “To be or not to be. That is the question.” For Catholic media, the question is not just whether or not it exists or even should exist, the question is what does it exist *for*. This question of its purpose, in essence, defines what Catholic media *is*. Simply having Catholic media outlets or coverage of Catholic events is not sufficient. The outlets and coverage must be directed toward a super-ordinate goal, its *raison d’être*.

This brings to mind several questions: What is “Catholic” media, what is Catholic media *for* and why should we care? How is it different from commercial or even Christian media, and I don’t mean merely stylistically, such as through the genre of the program or style of writing, but organizationally? technically? operationally?

So, what is Catholic media? Defining this allows us to use media, anything for that matter, more effectively. For example, we wouldn’t race a family sedan at LeMans. It is built to carry passengers to and from destinations. It can make it to the finish line, but it might not, and if it does it will be dead last. A Formula One race car however, is *made* to race in just such a race. From the ground up it is built for fast acceleration, tight maneuvering and good visibility. You can say that the two autos both belong to the *genus*: car, but they are different species. They each have a different *raison d’être*. They are conceived, built and operated in different ways, each according to its species, or specific purpose. There are similarities, of course: tires, steering wheel, engine, transmission, but these similarities are at the level of the *genus*. You wouldn’t use turn signals at LeMans and you wouldn’t drive the family sedan at 100 kph down city streets (unless perhaps you are in Rome).

In similar fashion, media has different species. We could define them broadly, at least in the U.S., as commercial, Christian and Catholic. We could also look at governmental and public sources. Their purpose defines their operations. For example, the purpose of commercial media is to make money, generally by selling commercials or ads. This purpose is neither for nor against the Church, *per se*. The rate to be charged for the commercial or ad is dependent upon the number of consumers for that medium. The manager/editor therefore seeks through content and style to generate the highest possible number of consumers so he can tell advertisers it is worth paying 30 million dollars to buy a 60 second Superbowl commercial. The programming is a means, even the listeners or readers are means to the end, which is money. That is not to say that some broadcasters or publishers do not have other purposes as well, for example to serve the common good, but even this is generally second to the goal to make money.

Christian media, generally, is not driven by the profit motive. Its purposes are usually, family-friendly entertainment, or social action, or exhorting the consumer to live a Godly life. It has many similarities to Catholic media, but its purpose(s), or super-ordinate goal, is/are not exactly the same.

According to *Novo Millenio Inneunte*, the super-ordinate goal of Catholic media, that toward which all of its works must be planned, all of its energies must be directed, and all of its content chosen, is the super-ordinate goal of the Church, that is, holiness.¹ (This genus/species comparison is also directly applicable to other Catholic works, such as Catholic schools, hospitals, etc. Is a Catholic school simply a place with a Crucifix on the wall in which, for example, a person is taught math, science and history, or is it a place wherein the Faith is infused into science, history literature, etc., so that the person is formed and the Gospel inculturated to the eternal benefit of the child and the Church? This is an important aspect of both tactical and strategic planning for any organization and could be the topic of

another conference. Attached is a skeleton outline of the elements involved as it will help you to put some of these comments in context.)

Because of the similarities within the genus there are aspects of operations and equipment that are similar, i.e., Catholic media, like Christian and commercial media uses ink, paper, transmitters and computers. Also, good writing and good technical production values are important whether you are covering the Olympics in Rome or the Church of Rome, but those considerations, important though they may be, are secondary. As Professor Mora pointed out in his opening presentation, a leader must be focused on results of the organization's essence, not in secondary points. As an example, consider the difference between a commercial TV station reporting on the issuance of an encyclical and a Catholic TV station doing the same thing. One's goal is to merely report the news, thereby providing a service important enough to some that they tune in; the other's goal is to convey the teachings of Jesus Christ to make a difference in the salvation of the viewer. If distinctions are not made, and lived, these lower goods, these similarities at the level of the genus, or even the goals of a different species, *become* the driving force in Catholic media. Focus turns to style or structure over substance. The measure of the success of the apostolate might be counted more by the number of listeners than the number of conversions. The apostolate might become merely a commercial, or christian, entity with a Catholic name.

This can happen if merely experts in media are used to chart the course of a media apostolate. Clearly there is great benefit in hiring experts in accounting, distribution, audio and video processing, etc. to assist in the technical aspects of the medium (the Toyota auto mechanic can fix the flat tire on the Formula 1 car), but the work and goal of such apostolates is a work of evangelization with a goal of salvation. Such works must always have the writings of the Popes and the Saints as their guides. Aquinas tells us that action follows upon being (*agere sequitur esse*) and you cannot give what you do not possess (*Nemo dat quod non habet*). So just as you would not hire the Toyota mechanic to drive the Formula 1 car (or merely a professional educator to lead a Catholic school) so the leader of a Catholic media apostolate must first know Christ and know how and intend to convey Him to others. In short, he must know how to evangelize and that must be his or her purpose. Writers, editors, producers and managers of Catholic press and electronic media must be Catholic evangelists...first. Can someone whose training in life is merely to be a writer, radio host, TV reporter, etc. really lead a Catholic media effort?

I often hear that Catholic media is an instrument of evangelization, or, more often, the “new evangelization”. This is exactly true. They are instruments at the service of the new evangelization, but what, in reality, is the new evangelization? Since Pope John Paul II called for it, let's look at his definition. In *Ecclesia in America* he said,

“everyone should keep in mind that the vital core of the new evangelization must be a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the person of Jesus Christ, that is, the preaching of his name, his teaching, his life, his promises and the Kingdom which he has gained for us by his Paschal Mystery”²

Pope Paul VI said this same thing 14 years earlier in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. He wrote:

[T]he Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs.”³

Some 1,900 years earlier, St. Paul told us he preached Christ crucified; a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles...but the wisdom and power of God.⁴

For all of these great evangelists, the content of evangelization was Jesus Christ, the power was Jesus Christ, and the end or purpose toward which the activity was directed was union with Jesus Christ; an adherence to His teachings and life here on Earth and unity with Him forever in Heaven.

I think Professor Mora's point about being humble recipients of the identity of the organization of which we are called to be communicators, is in no place more true than in the Church. Catholic media are called to communicate Christ in a special way.

In the US there is a saying in media circles that "content is king". In Catholic media throughout the world the saying must become, "content is *the* King". It is Jesus Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. It is He for whom we are made and for whom each and every person yearns, though some may know it not.

Pope Benedict hit on this point when he was addressing the Bishops of Germany during World Youth Day. He said,

"I do not know. Perhaps on the one hand, heathens should have access to a sort of pre-catechesis that opens them to the faith ... but on the other, it is always necessary to have the courage to transmit the mystery itself, in its beauty and greatness, and pave the way to the impulse to contemplate, love and recognize it: ah, this is it!"⁵

"Contemplate, love and recognize it"... Yes, it is hard to fall in love with a pre-catechetical endeavor. It is easy to fall in love with the person of Jesus Christ. Pope John Paul made this point in *Ecclesia in America*, "the Church in America must speak increasingly of Jesus Christ, the human face of God and the divine face of man. It is this proclamation that truly makes an impact on people, awakens and transforms hearts, in a word, converts".⁶ The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference reiterated this point in their Pastoral Letter on the Church and the Media, "Go Tell Everyone".⁷

Permit me an example: A few months ago we hosted the eighth annual Global Catholic radio conference. One of the station managers in attendance related the story of young man that was bent on committing suicide. He had lost his home and his family and got into his pickup truck, intending to drive off a bridge into a quarry below. As he frantically searched the dial for some hard rock music (I think that is telling in and of itself) he came across the local Catholic radio station. A priest was speaking about the love of Christ for each and every person. The man listened to the whole program and in the morning went in to talk to a priest. He has since come back to the practice of the Faith and he attributes it to Catholic radio.

Was it a "sort of pre-catechesis" that caught this man's heart? Was it news, sports, or weather? Or did the station "have the courage to transmit the mystery itself...and pave the way to contemplate, love and recognize it. Ah, this is it."

This incident displays clearly St. Augustine's words, "Our souls are restless until they rest in you." Pope John Paul reiterated this in *Redemptor Hominis*, since man is made in the image and likeness of God, he is made for Love.⁸ By extension he is also made for Truth, Beauty, etc. When man hears Truth Incarnate...when he sees "beauty ever ancient and ever new"...when he beholds Love that died upon the Cross for him it is like striking and holding a tuning fork next to his soul, it resonates within him and beckons him to respond in love and in action.

In *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Paul VI asked, "In our day, what has happened to that hidden energy of the Good News, which is able to have a powerful effect on man's conscience?"⁹ I think it, or rather, He, is still at work. Those Catholic media who unequivocally, unapologetically, unashamedly proclaim Jesus Christ and Him crucified would agree. They see the work of the Holy Spirit on a daily basis and are having a profound impact in the Church. In my own country we have only to look at the profound

impact of one of our members, the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN). It has become the world's largest religious media enterprise in only 20 years by faithfully having the "courage to transmit the mystery itself, in its beauty and greatness." Other efforts - better funded, better planned, and better marketed - are merely a memory.

Our Lord said, "By their fruits you shall know them".¹⁰ Look at the fruits of Catholic media that focus upon the mission of the Church to teach all nations all that Christ has commanded us.¹¹ Did not St. John tell us in his First Letter, "this is the love of God: that we keep his commandments"?¹² Did not the Holy Spirit tell us through *Christus Dominus* that bishops should "strive to make use of the various media at hand nowadays for proclaiming Christian doctrine, namely, first of all, preaching and catechetical instruction which always hold the first place"?¹³ How can people know and love God if they are not taught? Against the "wisdom" of the world these efforts bear great fruit for the Kingdom.

So how do we take these principles and incorporate them to bear fruit in our Catholic media efforts?

We must ask ourselves, is style driving our efforts or is content *the* King?

Are those who direct the apostolate Catholic communicators or merely communicators who happen to be Catholic?

Do we have as our aim merely the number of listeners or readers or the change in their lives, that is have we confused the species?

Do we simply ape the commercial media by producing a Catholic version of it, akin to merely hanging a Crucifix on the wall of a school and claiming the name Catholic?

Do we place more trust in pre-catechetical efforts than the Gospel itself?

or

Do we write/program our apostolates with an eye to "transmit the mystery itself...and pave the way to contemplate, love and recognize it?"

Ah, this is it!

Notes

¹ Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Inneunte*, (2001), n. 30.

² Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, (1999), n. 66.

³ Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, (1975), n.18.

⁴ cf. 1 Cor. 1:23-24

⁵ Address of his Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, Cologne -Archbishop's House, 21 August 2005

⁶ n. 67

⁷ Australian Catholic Bishop's Conference, *Go Tell Everyone*, (2006), p. 4.

⁸ Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, (1979), n. 10.

⁹ Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, (1975), n. 4.

¹⁰ Mt. 7:16

¹¹ cf. Mt. 27:20

¹² 1 Jn. 5:3

¹³ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church, *Christus Dominus*, (1965), n. 13.

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A Strategic Planning Framework

1. Super-Ordinate Goal – The primary goal toward which all aspects of the organization are directed. The goal the achievement of which the success of the organization is measured, e.g., in the Church – holiness, salvation, *communio*, etc. This presupposes there can be sub-ordinate goals; goals set in relation to and that find there true meaning in the super-ordinate goal, i.e., care for the sick, care for the poor, education, etc.
2. Strategies – The actions taken by the organization, the accomplishment of which achieves, in whole or in part, the super-ordinate goal. In the Church these are the works of evangelization about which Pope Paul VI wrote in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.
3. Staffing – The number and types of staff needed to populate the various works required by the strategies
4. Skills – Each strategy embarked upon will require particular skills of the staff assigned to accomplish it. The staff must have the requisite skills for action *follows* upon being (*Agere sequitur esse*) it does not precede it. Staff must be able to convey what they have or know (*Nemo dat quod non habet*). For the Church, it is not enough to possess a skill, you must know Christ in order to introduce Him to others. You must understand the basic Christian anthropological nature of mankind in order to direct an evangelization outreach.
5. Structure – Allocation of the staff, management, governance of the organization to achieve the super-ordinate goal. For the Church this must be within the confines of Canon Law and be able to operate in a proactive style.
6. System – Here some practices from the business world can be mined to extract underlying principles that can be applied with proper ecclesiology to the Church. These would include effective supervision and accountability, internal and external communications, project planning, regular assessment of the Church’s impact on the culture, effective use of staff meetings and consultative bodies, knowledge and effective use of technology to increase productivity and reduce staffing, new financial vehicles, employee benefits, etc.
7. Style – The Good Shepherd. Jesus described humanity as sheep without a shepherd. Our shepherds and leaders must lead with truth and courage, relying upon Divine Providence to grant the increase to their faithful efforts
8. Shekels – What amount is now necessary to be found to pay for the above work.

<p>VERSIONE PROVVISORIA IN ATTESA DELLA PUBBLICAZIONE DEGLI ATTI</p>
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