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## THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND DIGITAL COMMUNICATION: A HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY ANALYSIS

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### SUMMARY

This work investigates the evolution of communication in the Catholic Church throughout history, with a special focus on the impact of the Second Vatican Council and the digital age. The research analyzes how the Church has adapted its communication strategies to different eras, from its beginnings to the present day. Through a literature review, the study explores the relationship between faith and culture, identifying the challenges and opportunities that the Church has faced throughout the centuries. The results indicate that digital communication represents a new chapter in the history of the Church, offering both challenges and opportunities for evangelization and the strengthening of the community. The research concludes that the training of pastoral agents in digital communication is fundamental for the Church to take full advantage of the potential of new technologies and reach an increasingly digital audience.

**Keywords:** Catholic Church. Communication. Digital technology. Second Vatican Council. Evangelization.

## INTRODUCTION

Communication, intrinsic to nature. Humanity, as a distinguishing characteristic from other animals, has always been present in the Catholic Church. Since the earliest communities, the need to transmit the faith and strengthen the community has led the Church to adapt its communication strategies to different eras.

This work aims to analyze the trajectory of communication in the Catholic Church, from its beginnings to the present day, with emphasis on the role of the Second Vatican Council in transforming the Church's approach to the media, especially from the Decree onwards. *Inter Merifica*, which marked the epistemological turning point in the Church's discourse, with regard to the media.

Understanding the evolution of is justified. communication as fundamental. To understand the dynamics of the relationship between faith and culture, as well as the role of the Church in contemporary society. By analyzing the different phases of ecclesial communication, the aim is to identify the challenges and opportunities that the Church has faced throughout the centuries.

This work is intended to students and lay researchers interested in religion, communication history and sociology. In addition, This could be useful. For theologians, church communicators, and

other communicators working in the field of religious communication.

## 1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 1.1 From Myth to Religion

The man. It is, par excellence, a communicative being. And, since its creation, it has sought ways to communicate in order to better establish itself in community, with language being its main distinguishing feature from other animals.

The online dictionary Oxford Languages. The etymology of communication is defined as: "it originates from Latin." *communicare* which means "to make common", "to share", "to exchange opinions", "to associate", "to confer".

From the earliest times, humankind has sought to establish communication with divinity, resorting to Myth, "a word that comes from the Greek *mythos*, which means to converse, to tell, to narrate" (FREITAS, 2010, p. 61). This continues...according to the author...that such narrative thinking provided people with explanations for the world in which they lived, based on subjective opinions. As Silva states, the development of coexistence and relationships between individuals in society, from the most...complex to the most Simple, they

generate a set of situations, called institution.

We can say that a social institution is an organized system of relatively permanent social relations that incorporates certain patterns of behavior in order to satisfy and/or meet the basic needs of a society (Silva, 2010, p. 28).

Thus, as Freitas argues (cited work), "Philosophical language is argumentative, although it also constitutes a form of explanation of reality and human life" (p. 61), thus distancing itself from myth. Religion establishes itself with the same purpose.

Bruno Vaiano, in interview with the Magazine Super Interessante states that "a mythology is a collection of stories – more specifically, myths – that a culture uses as a basis to explain natural phenomena or justify its customs."

There is no room here for value judgments about the fictional nature of myths, especially since many religions use mythical language in their sacred writings, and this does not make them any less sacred. However, religion still.

While it may revolve around certain myths, it is much broader, encompassing practicality and ritual, with devotees worshipping their deities.

## 1.2 The Catholic Religion

Several religions already existed in antiquity. However, the vast majority were polytheistic, that is, they believed in multiple gods. Judaism is the oldest monotheistic religion, worshipping and venerating one and only one God.

It is within the Jewish context, under Roman rule, that Jesus Christ enters history. The birth of the promised and awaited Messiah marks history to such an extent that the calendar is established according to before and after him.

For 30 years, we have had little news about Jesus of Nazareth. At thirty years He begins his public life, inaugurating the Kingdom of God on earth, through his preaching, being This is the central theme of their communication.

According to the Gospel, "Jesus spoke with authority" (Mt 7:29), and he did so in a way that led his listeners to understand everything he said, using many...sometimes, using parables to reach people through their communication. those who listened to him. Besides living what he preached, he was close to the poorest and served all who needed him. from him They needed it.

Through his preaching and authority, he gathered many followers, among them the twelve apostles, with whom he founded the Catholic Church, a

monotheistic religion based on love, compassion, and brotherhood.

Merciful Judge, Jesus knew how to live the triad of compassion, sympathy, and empathy like no other.

Shakespeare, in King Lear, apud GOLDIM (year?), unite this triad that seems to cause the most confusion:

(...) He who suffers alone, suffers much more in his mind (spirit). He leaves behind freedom and joy. But the mind (spirit) with much suffering can overcome itself. When pain has friends and they endure its company, how light and bearable my pain seems now. (<https://www.ufrgs.br/bioetica/compaix.htm>)

The great communicator, Jesus Christ, knew how to endure the desolate loneliness at the hands of a large part of the group he gathered, who wanted to crown him King of Israel, and he sided with the ruling power. Even so He establishes communication with the Father: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:24).

In what way refers to communication? It must be said that Jesus was the great communicator of history and, to his disciples, he instructed them in private to proclaim what he taught: “What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the housetops” (Mt 10:27). Therefore, the

Catholic Church has the mission to communicate. And that is what the group of early Christianity did; “what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you” (cf. 1 John 1-3). Following this command of the Master, the present time greatly needs to use technology so that Jesus may be known and loved.

### **1.3 The Church and the historical process of Communication**

In the early centuries, communication took place orally, transmitting "sacred teachings" based on tradition, because there were no writings, except for some papyri from the Old Testament. In this sense, the role of tradition is of paramount importance for everything to be transmitted from one generation to another. In the early communities, orality prevailed, allowing dialogue and debate among the baptized, communicators of the message of salvation.

The growth of Christianity underscores the hierarchical order of the Church, with communication occurring through the pulpit, where speech was the exclusive domain of ecclesiastical authority, without the possibility of interaction with the audience.

For 1,500 years, before the printing press, papyri were copied by hand, with records of over five thousand scattered

throughout libraries worldwide. This was the technique used to preserve such writings. Possessing knowledge for fifteen centuries, the Church controlled communication. The development of technology, as an extension of its workforce, benefited other fields.

With the advent of the printing press, the transmission of knowledge took on different forms. This fact shook the Church, because as SILVA rightly points out: "No one doubts that man is living through a time of crisis due to the very changes recorded in all aspects of life" (2010, p. 27).

In addition to the invention of Gutenberg during this period, Martin Luther, a German monk, broke with the Church, publishing his...<sup>95</sup> theses. He challenged the prevailing simony (the sale of indulgences as payment for sins), the buying and selling of illicit indulgences, and the prohibition of marriage for priests, culminating in the famous five solas: Faith alone; Scripture alone; Christ alone; Grace alone; Glory to God alone. And, as if that weren't enough, he translated the Bible into the German vernacular, enabling everyone to read and interpret the Holy Scriptures.

In fact, the Church had already shown signs of concern about communication at different times and during different pontificates. Puntel, citing the study by José Marques Melo, reports:

In 1487, Innocent VIII publishes *Inter Multiplices*, defending the Church's thinking on written media and how to approach them (...). In 1766 Pope Clement XIII, referring to the danger of (printed) works of an anti-Christian nature, wrote the *Encyclical Christianae Republicae* in which such works were condemned and the power of the bishops to combat immoral reading was reaffirmed."

Pope Leo XIII, who governed the Church for over twenty-five years, emphasized the need to combat "writing by writing," adopting the use of communication technology as a "battlefield." Thus, the Church began to utilize available means of communication to proclaim its faith.

As can be seen, at this stage, the Church had great difficulty in recognizing the positive values of the media as instruments for defending human dignity.

The Church demonstrated a conservative stance towards technological innovations, characterized by a 'suspicious acceptance' of new means of communication, as pointed out by Puntel (2011, p. 223). This resistance was understandable, considering the rapid social transformations and uncertainties generated by new technologies.

#### 1.4 The "aggiornamento" of the Second Vatican Council

The Second Vatican Council represented a historical milestone for the Catholic Church, marking a period of profound transformations and renewals. The term *aggiornamento*, popularized by John XXIII, summarizes the essence of this process: an updating of the Church to respond to the challenges and demands of a new era, world in constant change.

At the heart of these transformations, communication emerged as a central theme. The Church, traditionally conservative regarding the means of communication, realized the need to adapt to the new times and use modern tools to spread the Good News.

Puntel (2011) states that the power of the media was consolidating in society and that new forms of mediated interaction were an important stage in human evolution. Barros (2003) follows the same line when recognizing that the Council sought to deepen the dialogue between the Church and society, pursuing more effective and efficient actions in the field of communication.

The Council perceived the technological advancement, with a sudden change of course, in comparison to vision previous. Thus, the Decree *Inter*

*Mirifica*, according to Moraes and Souza (2023), one of the first to be approved, marked "the epistemological turning point in the Catholic Church's discourse regarding the media" (p.300).

Thus, this Decree recognized the importance of social media for evangelization and encouraged the Church to use them more effectively, without the possibility of backsliding in its relationship with the culture produced by social communication.

An assessment of Vatican II, considering authors such as Moraes e Souza, Puntel, and many others, acknowledges that the Decree *Inter Mirifica* did not have the same importance for the renewal of the Church, such as the Dogmatic Constitutions, other Decrees and even Declarations; this is because, according to Puntel said, "The Decree looked to the past and not the future, it looked inward and not outward," which displeased the media professionals of the time.

The truth is that the Decree *Inter Mirifica* built a solid foundation in the field of Social Communication within the Catholic Church, leading it to invest in the creation of its own media outlets, adapting to new technologies and encouraging dialogue with others, religions and cultures promoting understanding and mutual respect.

## **1.5 The Catholic Church and Communication in Brazil**

In Brazil, The trajectory of church communication is marked by profound transformations, from the oral evangelization of pioneering missionaries to the complex reality of this digital age.

During the oral period, missionaries used words, music, and gestures to transmit the Christian message to the natives, with catechesis in the Tupi language, using catechisms and images to facilitate understanding.

With the arrival of the printing press in Brazil, the Church began to use this new medium to spread its teachings. Newspapers, magazines, and religious books contributed to the education of lay people and their understanding of the Catholic faith. However, censorship and control of production were common during the colonial period.

The Second Vatican Council marked the Catholic Church, spurring a profound renewal. The Decree *Inter mirifica*, enacted in 1963, highlighted the role of social media in evangelization, encouraging the Church to utilize them. In Brazil, the Decree was received with enthusiasm and spurred the creation of several Catholic media outlets.

“The Church, therefore, considers it its duty to preach the message of salvation, making use of the means of social communication, and teaches men to use these means rightly.” (IM, n. 3). Araujo, cited by Moraes (2017), when reading the interview with the Catholic marketing specialist, Kater Filho, states what, “With the social ascension of the C class, more people have started to have cable TV and, during church services, have access to more than 80 channels with sports, entertainment, and news.” Shopping centers, which replace the role of the parish and the community, also compete. Thus, the competition is very intense.

High and quite qualified, leading “the propagation of the doctrine to be thought of and practiced according to what the media determines.” (p. 28).

Nevertheless, the rise of social media and digitalization has brought numerous opportunities for the Catholic Church, but it has also exposed the institution to new challenges: the emergence of extremist groups that use the platforms to spread hate speech, intolerance, and religious fundamentalism, often in the name of Catholicism.

The COVID-19 pandemic made clear the challenges and opportunities presented by the profound changes in various sectors of society, and the Church was no exception. The necessary isolation

and distancing imposed new demands on ecclesial communication, requiring rapid adaptation to digital technologies and the creation of new forms of interaction with the faithful.

The ongoing process was accelerated by the Church, which found itself obliged to intensify contact with the faithful. New forms of evangelization emerged: online masses; virtual prayer groups and digital formation meetings.

The lack of physical contact and the difficulty of creating a virtual space for fellowship were some of the challenges faced. However, online broadcasts allowed the Church's message to reach a wider audience, transcending geographical boundaries.

## **2 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Data analysis reveals that the Catholic Church faces significant challenges in the digital age, such as competition with other sources of information and entertainment, the need to adapt language and communication formats to new generations, and the growing importance of social media. However, new technologies also offer numerous opportunities for evangelization, such as the possibility of reaching a wider and more diverse audience and strengthening the virtual community.

Social media has become a fundamental channel for Church communication, allowing real-time interaction with the faithful and the rapid dissemination of messages and events. However, caution is needed regarding the proliferation of false information and the polarization of opinions. The Church must invest in strategies to ensure the authenticity of information and promote respectful and constructive dialogue on social media.

Despite the growth of digital communication, the importance of personal contact and community experience remains fundamental to the life of the Church. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need to find a balance between the virtual and in-person dimensions of faith.

The future of church communication is intrinsically linked to the development of digital technologies. Artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and the Internet of Things are just some of the trends that can transform how the Church communicates. It is essential that the Church be prepared to keep up with these changes and take advantage of the new opportunities they offer.

Training pastoral agents in digital communication is fundamental for the Church to fully leverage the potential of new technologies and reach an increasingly digital audience. The ability to use digital

tools effectively and strategically is essential for:

### **1. Evangelization:**

- Expanded reach: Social media and other digital channels allow the evangelizing message to reach a wider and more diverse audience, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries.
- Appropriate language: Training in digital communication enables pastoral agents to adapt the language and formats of messages to each audience, making evangelization more relevant and engaging.
- Interaction: Digital tools facilitate interaction between pastoral agents and the faithful, allowing for closer and more personalized dialogue.

### **2. Strengthening the Community:**

- Engagement: Social media and other digital platforms can be used to strengthen community ties, promoting the participation of the faithful in Church events and activities.
- Sense of belonging: Digital communication can help create a sense of belonging to the

community, even for those who cannot participate in activities in person.

### **3. Combating misinformation:**

- Producing quality content: Training in digital communication empowers pastoral agents to produce informative and reliable content, combating the spread of fake news and distorted information about the Church.
- Crisis management: In times of crisis, digital communication allows the Church to communicate quickly and transparently with its faithful, minimizing the negative impact of rumors and misinformation.

### **4. Adapting to new technologies:**

- Constant updating: The digital world is constantly evolving, so it is essential that pastoral agents are always up-to-date on new tools and trends.
- Creating innovative content: Training in digital communication enables pastoral agents to create more creative and innovative content, using resources such as videos, podcasts,

and infographics.

### **Essential Skills for Pastoral Agents:**

- **Knowledge of digital tools:** It is essential that pastoral agents master the main tools for creating and editing content, such as video and image editing software, social media management platforms, and data analysis tools.
- **Critical thinking:** The ability to critically evaluate information available on the internet is essential to avoid the spread of fake news and distorted information.
- **Communication skills:** Clear and effective communication is fundamental to conveying the evangelizing message in a clear and concise manner.
- **Cultural sensitivity:** It is important that pastoral agents be sensitive to different cultures and contexts, adapting language and content to the needs of each audience.

In short, training pastoral agents in digital communication is a fundamental investment for the Church. By mastering digital tools and best communication

practices, pastoral agents will be able to reach a wider audience, strengthen the community, and promote evangelization more effectively.

### **3 CONCLUSION**

The Catholic Church's journey in communication is marked by constant adaptation to new technologies. The Second Vatican Council represented a milestone in this process, encouraging the Church to use social media to evangelize and engage in dialogue with society. The digital age, with its infinite possibilities, presents new challenges and opportunities for the Church.

Training pastoral agents in digital communication is essential for the Church to fully leverage the potential of new technologies and reach an increasingly digital audience. By mastering digital tools and best communication practices, pastoral agents can strengthen the community, promote evangelization more effectively, and adapt the Church to the challenges of the contemporary world.

The future of ecclesial communication is promising. With creativity, innovation, and a strong theological foundation, the Church can use digital tools to build bridges, promote dialogue, and bring the Good News to all

corners of the world. However, the Church needs to invest in training, infrastructure, and strategic partnerships to meet the challenges and seize the opportunities offered by the digital age.

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