



Jubilee Year - Exploring Inter Mirifica

(Decree on the Means of Social Communication)

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Inter Mirifica translated means *Among the Wonderful*. In hindsight, I think it would have been extremely valuable if the Council Fathers had had even more foresight into the future. I don't think there is any question they would have devoted much more time exploring life, altering role the media would play on the world. With that said, I think what *Inter Mirifica* did do is open the door for others to walk through and explore in much more depth the realities of the media world.

Introduction

Media is one of the marvelous inventions human beings have created. It has an ability to lift humanity or damage it. If it is misused, there will be damage done to the world.

Chapter One – On the Meaning of the Church

- Media must be used morally. This applies to those who watch, read or listen to the media, as well as those who produce media and regulate it.
- Choices and decisions concerning the media should be based on moral principles.
- Mediums of communication can influence humankind in a positive or a negative way.
- The highest calling of the media is to reveal truth, truth as it relates in some fashion to the *good news* of salvation.
- Media should promote the unity of people and assist in the struggle to improve the quality of life in societies.

- The end purpose of media shouldn't be measured in financial profits, as much as it should be gauging it to a high standard.
- When something is communicated that has substance, we have the potential to improve who we are.
- The ultimate purpose of communication doesn't reside in its ability to entertain and provide emotional stimulation.
- The social object to communication is to foster brotherhood and unity. When forms of communication are misused, humans are distanced.
- Abuse in communication promotes conflict among people and evil will expand where disunity exists.
- Disharmony in humanity is what allows evil to thrive.
- Where there is freedom of access to information people can flourish. A well-informed society shapes valuable opinions.
- When the information provided is false and biased, the opinions society develops become misrepresentations of what is reality. This leads to a society which is ill prepared to respond and correct those parts of it that are unjust and so the progress of humanity is seriously stifled.
- Communication is never guaranteed to reach us in a perfect manner, even when every effort is made. These imperfections reflect our humanity. However, there is a moral responsibility on the part of the media when they make mistakes to put aside pride and cost and correct the communication.
- Communicating certain realities of this world involves challenging responsibilities. For instance, issues containing subject matter that are violent, sexual, and degrading to human life require people to make media decisions with considerably deliberate thought on how this material should be presented in a tasteful way, ensuring relevant pertinent truth be revealed. It is not beneficial to conceal the harsh realities of the world. On the other hand, it is also not beneficial to society to desensitize people to harsh realities and or to promote what is corrupt.
- Humanity advances intellectually when there are diverse means of education and people have access to it.
- The media is an instrument by which masses of people can be reached in an extremely rapid time (with the advances of technology, this is often instantaneous).

- Media can also become a needed escape from a busy life, filled with responsibility. Communication can be entertaining and provide a form of relaxation. There is merit in this escape when self-control is applied.
- If the media becomes so dominant in one's life that it prevents one from living a well-rounded life, then it does not add value.
- There is an essential value to the artistic expression associated with media in that it can provide spiritual reward. We are constructed by God so that we learn by all five senses. Media can touch these senses in a heightened way.
- When media is used to facilitate greater awareness of spiritual realities, it provides a moral and religious benefit. This can result in us being drawn closer to one another and ultimately to God.
- Life can be better understood when the media is used to reveal both the dark side and the righteous side of humanity. Insight into both reveals the ultimate proper order of how we are meant to exist.
- The use of advertising as social communication can benefit people when it offers a truthful representation of goods and services that are useful in a person's life. It is in creating a false portrait of what we need and desire that advertising misses the mark. Advertising that provides a distorted view of what is ideal and good for us is extremely harmful. It is by creating desires that are false to Gospel values that people are led to believe that they will find joy and peace through things. When a person is preoccupied with materialism, they distance themselves from God and other people.
- The selection process of determining where we get our communication has become a very complicated task and what we end up accessing does have a profound effect on who and what we become. Without an understanding and/or an appreciation for morality and what is good for society it becomes virtually impossible for someone to make mature judgments about communication choices.
- Parents need to raise their children in such a way that as their children mature, they become capable of discerning what is appropriate. In the case of the young person who is given complete freedom to access anything and everything, it typically results in developing permanent psychological and moral harm.
- Parents are responsible for leading children to moral responsibility.

- It is a responsibility of society through civil authority to support the process of educating, legislating, and financing (in some cases) communications that serve the public good.
- Where there is a deficient level of social communication there is also additional social, political, educational, and financial deficiencies as well.
- Lack of social communication is one of the important factors that cause deficiencies in society.
- Christians are responsible for one another. Anytime we strive to further human progress, whether socially or culturally, a notable service is done. It is in and through this that walls come down and brotherhood becomes possible.

Chapter Two – On the Pastoral Activity of the Church

- There is a need in the world for Catholic press and the production of good, moral films and programs.
- The Vatican Two Fathers recommend a follow up document be generated in the future, to address the pressing issues of the day.
- There is a potential opportunity for collaboration between people on local and international levels to further the progress of humankind.
- The Council suggested the establishment of a *World Communications Day*, a day for every man and woman who believe in God to pray and reflect about the future and the present problems with media.
- It is recommended that meetings involving media professionals be instituted to explore ways to press for progress in the media.
- The Church needs to better understand public opinion, how it is formed and how it affects people.
- The Church needs to deepen its understanding of events and issues and then speak out in love.
- The goal of Catholic media is to form, strengthen, and spread public views which are in harmony with the natural law and with Catholic teachings and precepts.
- The Church is to use whatever media is available to enlighten the human mind of all the various cultures in the world. The Church needs to transmit religious broadcasts

to individuals who for various reasons cannot gain access to the Church and specifically to the Gospel message.

- The Second Vatican Council decrees that an office for the communication media be set up in every country. These national offices have a responsibility to develop the conscience of the faithful and to assist the Catholic individuals who contribute to the field of media. These national offices should collaborate amongst themselves. These offices are to report to a regional committee of bishops. The international associations are to be approved by and function on the support of the Holy See.

Comments

The future of humanity appears to be becoming more and more reliant and shaped by the media. Concern should be given because possibly unlike any other period in history, media is seriously affecting the fate of humanity.

The Catholic Church did follow up on the recommendation of *Inter Mirifica*. This past May was the 58th anniversary of the initiation of *World Communications Day*. We would do well to better understand how communication is really taking place now if we expect to bring the Gospel to the world in a meaningful way.

There is a direct effort taking place around the globe to spread false information. In many ways there is an agenda to minimize the Gospel and spread falseness about Catholicism. Despite some excellent Catholic Apps like: *Laudate, Formed, Hallow, Verbum, Relevant Radio, Catholic Answers, Ascension Bible & Catechism*, (to name a few) there is a challenge threatening the integrity of Catholic witness online.

New forms of the media are emerging all the time. Media provides a platform for spreading Catholic teachings to a global audience instantly. YouTube is the second largest search engine in the world. It is good to see authentic evangelists like Bishop Robert Barron, Fr. Mike Schmitz, Chris Stefanick, Sister Bethany Madonna, and Sister Miriam James, (to name a few) proclaiming the Gospel and revealing deeper truths of the faith through this medium. Whether we like it or not, more people care about what social networks say than the Church. Today's information landscape is where many people find their truth. Media is where people form feelings and perceptions about what is true. Social media isn't a fad; it's

a fundamental shift in the way much of the world communicates and seeks out its own safe space. The way information is shared is changing and communities are being shaped through the media.

Many are rightly concerned over all the divisiveness and deepening rifts. Many like to say that a major cause for this is because Church leadership just won't let people decide for themselves what is right for them, to let people choose the Gospel parts that fit their own narrative. For starters let me remind us of what St Augustine said in regard to this: *If you believe what you like in the Gospels and reject what you don't like, it is not the Gospel you believe, but yourself.* The Church is the vehicle by which Jesus chose to preserve the truth of the Gospel. The Church has a responsibility to react to and be extremely active in the media. The Church must remain a visible force in the world and stay in touch with current world views and attitudes. The Catholic Church's role is to center on truth and not on personal agendas.

The role media has played in fostering evil and violence in the world cannot be overstated. The continuing distortion coming from the media draw us further away from truth, further away from God. When sensitive news is being reported it is as if two different events are taking place. The sad reality is extreme opinions, packaged well is what sells, not the truth. The media is far from being a force that promotes what is good. We must encourage young Catholic men and women pursuing careers in journalism and the entertainment field to create worthy art that reveals God's truth and beauty. We must reach out and seriously encourage men and women who God is calling to artistically communicate humanity's best. And we had best realize that for the next generation, the social media is defining sex, marriage and family. The media is changing the world. The media is actively determining what is morally acceptable. The world has and always will be looking to fill a void, and often, the world falls short in filling it; it falls short, because much of the world hungers for what it doesn't know – God. Jesus commands us: *Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15).*

Recently, I was out to brunch with my wife, as I looked around the crowded restaurant, ¾ of the patrons were with someone else and yet they appeared to be busy looking at their smart phones. Scrolling on phones takes us away from being personally present to others. I'm pretty sure it takes many away from prayer and Mass too. The media is not inherently bad, but without discipline it distances us from one another and from God. Social media can feed our pride and lead us to focus on ourselves. Pope Francis declared the year 2025 a Year of Jubilee. He asked us to embark on a holy journey of faith and repentance. Let us journey closer to the truth that hope rests in God's plan, not human tools. And as

Christians we are to ever serve the Gospel. The Gospel reveals the truth. The truth has a name and a face – Jesus, and hope is found in the Gospel. *Hope does not disappoint.*