

***“Maximum Illud”* in communication Perspective**

When Pope Benedict XV published on November 30, 1919 his *Maximum Illud* Encyclical, Film as a new means of communication was just 25 years ‘old’ and in the process of emerging from a curiosity entertainment at popular festivals to a means of art of its own. Soon after the First World War Radio was another means of communication emerging beyond the Press, as a popular means, with the “British Broadcasting Corporation” (BBC) foundation 1926 considered as a starting point for regular systems also in other countries. Actually Pope Benedict XV himself had already soon after his election 1914 pointed towards the field of social communication in his first encyclical letter *Ad Beatissimi*” on Unity. There he refers to the reality of “Public Opinion” within and of the Church. He further published four documents on Preaching and promoted already 1915 a national organization for the Press in Italy. On August 1, 1916 he wrote to a congress in Bogota, Columbia “it is without question that catholic journals can offer great help in our times. In fact, the daily experience shows that these papers with their very easy distribution can do much to refute errors and stimulate those who are lazy. One can absolutely not lose the opportunity to edify good people instead of the being deceived by bad publications.” (cf. Eilers, 2014,p. 71 ff.) an idea which was repeated again 50 years later by Pope Pius XII in his Encyclical *Evangelii Praecones* on Mission.

After the first World War it was in a special way the concern of Pope Benedict XV to confirm and develop the Mission activities of the Church worldwide. For this his Encyclical *Maximum Illud*, is a testimony. The document became a foundation for the mission of the Church and is addressed to the heads of Mission *dicasteries*. It is considered as an initiative for a renewed Mission of the Church worldwide. This includes mainly structures and methods needed for mission work at a time where from the modern ‘media’ mainly the Press was in the mind of people.

Though not especially listing the ‘Media’ at this time, the Pope proposes, for the missionaries and their activities, however, dispositions which are needed to share and communicate faith far beyond Media and technology. Actually these dispositions seem even more important today in a digital world where traditional ‘Media’ seem to be losing in favor of a ***Permanently Online and Permanently Connected***” (POPC) world where everybody reaches instantly

everywhere becoming a communicator in people and society also for the mission of the Church.

Structures

The document describes first the structures of Mission and those responsible ('heads') with duties which can easily be compared with any *communication activities* which are usually also – though sometimes indirectly – related to mission activities. Communication in human life and society needs proper structures including proper responsibilities and duties which are reflected in the way communication is done, which means are chosen and how they are applied: "If people come ...under diligent rulers, from whose prudence and charity they may benefit in all things, their work will no doubt bear fruit..." What the document says about the missionary holds also for the communicator: their role and disposition determines not only the 'success' but also the way of communicating and even their means.

Another expression for good communication is also the willingness to share and create common meetings which the document proposes and sees "to be of greatest benefit".

The Encyclical further states that the missionary (head of a mission) "does not lock himself up within his own limits" but rather "tries to keep in touch and foster friendship..." first with his own companions but also with the people s/he serves which calls for "communicative persons" not only as superiors but also beyond.

Related to a proper communication is also the promotion of local clergy "who is linked by the bonds of origin, character, feelings and inclinations" which are far superior to those of any other means." This can be related not only to *interpersonal Communication* but also to a similar positive attitude to existing *cultures* which determines the way, how, where and with whom we communicate in a given situation. This is especially the field of "Intercultural Communication"!

Proper training and formation of indigenous clergy is a special concern of the encyclical which must also include properly adjusted ways and means of communication as reflected not only in teaching, but also in the way we deal with each other, how we celebrate the (Vatican II) liturgy but also how we share in culturally creative forms and attitudes.

Dispositions

The dispositions which Pope Benedict XV requires in *Maximum Illud* should also be the ones of any communicator who wants to be recognized as “minister of a Religion which embraces all people who adore God in Spirit and Truth” (Col 3,11) as the document says.

What is required by *Maximum Illud* for missionary training can easily also be specified for a proper social Communication Formation: “While ecclesiastical students, whom God should call, are trained for their apostolic expeditions, they must be by all means initiated into every department of knowledge, profane as well as sacred” which today definitely includes also the field of “Social Communication”, and here especially “pastoral and evangelizing Communication”!

One requirement for communication is also the ability and proper use of *language*. *Maximum Illud* has a special section on so called ‘local’ languages demanding a ‘thorough’ and not just a superficial ability for language which after all is a main element in any communication: “The missionary is at the service of all...and ought to know what power a perfect command of language gives to gain a sympathetic hearing from a crowd.”

The importance of *libraries* for study and formation of missionaries is listed under the section of ‘training’, going beyond theology including “every department of knowledge.”

Virtues

The ‘missionary virtues’ described under this title in the document qualify at the same time for a proper communicator: “...granted, therefore that the missionary (and communicator!) be endowed with every quality of head and heart, versed in the sciences, accomplished in every department of culture, but when this accomplishments are not supported by innocence of life, they will be powerless instruments for the conversion of the people – nay more, they may become harmful to himself and to others. Let him, therefore, be an example of humility, obedience, chastity, and especially of piety, prayer and constant union with God: the better united he is with God, the greater will be his share in divine grace and assistance...It is by these virtues that truth finds an easy access to souls...” which can be said in the same way for a Christian Communicator!

50 years after Benedict XV Pope *John XXIII* repeats, referring to *Maximum Illud* in his 1959 Encyclical "*Princeps Pastorum*," on Mission, the same concerns in view of local clergy "to acquire the virtues which are demanded of them "as a strong and "a powerful incentive".

While *Maximum Illud* does not mention separately the *Media in Mission* work, Pope *Pius XII* does it in his Mission Encyclical *Evangelii Praecones* 1951 for the *Press* in saying: "An equally useful service is the dissemination of timely publications. It is scarcely necessary for us to dwell at length on this point, for everyone knows how effectively newspapers, magazines and reviews can be employed either to present truth and virtue in their proper light and thus to impress them on people's minds...Hence we warmly commend those bishops who interest themselves in the widest distribution of printed works of this sort which have been carefully edited. Though much has already been done in this regard. Much remains to be done."

The Vatican II document *Ad Gentes* again stresses social communication as important for training and formation in Mission (Nos. 26;36).

The now 100 years old document of Pope Benedict XV on Mission presents dispositions and the spirituality needed for proper of Communication which must be considered as a foundation for more detailed treatments of *Social Communication* in Mission encyclicals of the later Popes and several Vatican II documents, especially *Inter Mirifica*, *Dei Verbum*, *Ad Gentes* and *Gaudium et Spes*.

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