From "Gaudium et Spes" to a "New Culture"
Towards new ways of Communicating
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While the Council document on Social Communication *Inter Mirifica* was one of the first two documents of the Second Vatican Council published in December 1963 (cf. Eilers 2005)the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* on the 'Church in the Modern World' was published last (December 1965). Such a publication date has the advantage of reflecting considerations from earlier Council documents and it is interesting to look at the treatment of Social Communication in this perspective. *Gaudium et Spes* underlines the role of the modern media in society as "contributing to the spread of knowledge and the speedy distribution far and wide of habits, of thought and feeling, setting-off chain reactions in their wake…" (No. 6). One of the criteria of the modern world is "the intense development of interpersonal relationships due to no small measure to modern technical advances…" (No. 23).

It is the special contribution of *Gaudium et Spes* to place social communication and especially the media into modern culture as a cultural and social happening. From this perspective, the media "open up the riches of different cultures to each and every individual, with the result that a more universal form of culture is gradually taking shape, and through it the unity of mankind is being fostered and expressed in the measure that the particular characteristics of each culture are preserved." (No.54). *Gaudium et Spes* sees "many opportunities favorable to the development of a universal culture, thanks especially to the boom in book publication and new techniques of cultural and social communication…" (No. 61).

From such a perspective, one might ask how modern communication developed in the course of history and what are the implications and possibilities in human societies especially in view of modern developments and leading to a "new Culture" which is in a growing way determined by communication. .

The invention of movable letters for printing by Johannes Gutenberg in 1450 revolutionized the world. Instead of hand-written books, with a few copies, many copies of exactly the same text became available to a growing number of people. The unification of liturgical rites and procedures in the Church, for example, would not be possible without this new way of printing. Ideas of theologians and philosophers now became easily available to a greater public. The relative success and influence of the Reformation would not have been possible without the intensive use of the new printing method: While in German speaking countries there were only 40 new titles in 1500, already two years after the Reformation in 1519, there were 111 and four years later, 498 titles were published. Of them, 418 were written by Protestant authors. (cf. Eilers 2002, 65f.)

Death of Distance

The development of printing lasted over 450 years as the main technical means for communication until the creation of film in 1895 as a new and visual way of communicating. Only some 20 years later, followed broadcasting as an audio means. The technical developments and possibilities for communications grew with accelerating speed in the following decades… With the developments in

Internet, there seems to be further a movement towards a multimedia function united in only one device, which basically is a computer and this can even be a simple hand-held gadget only. The new developments indicate a "Death of Distance." Already in 1997 Frances Cairncross, senior editor of the London *Economist* described in her book with the same title the possible consequences of such developments. In a summary at the beginning she states besides others that (1998,p.XI-XVI):

- Distance will no longer determine the cost of communicating electronically and "no longer will location be key to most business decisions" because screen based activity can be anywhere in the world.
- "Most people on earth will eventually have access to networks that are all switched interactive and broadband…all ends of the network can communicate…"
- Communication and services will be more 'customized' i.e. consumers will "receive (or send) exactly what they want to receive, when and where they want it."
- "Because people's capacity to absorb new information will not increase, they will need filters, to sift, process and edit it".
- "The power of the computer to search, identify and classify according to similar needs and tastes will create sustainable markets for many niche products…"
- The "horizontal bonds among people performing the same job or speaking the same language in different parts of the world will strengthen. Common interests, experiences, and pursuits rather than proximity will bind these communities together."
- "Many more companies and customers will have access to price information…" also beyond the city and so-called developed areas.
- "Every form of communication will be available for mobile and remote use…"
- "Culture and communication networks, rather than rigid management structures, will hold companies together …Loyality, trust and open communications will shape the nature of customer and supplier contracts…"
- New ideas and information will travel faster to the remote corners of the world…but also a loss of privacy musty be expected.

Because of these new technical developments anybody can be reached and communicated with everywhere any time. We can not avoid life to become more and more computerized and technically determined.

Modern communication impacts all areas of life in a growing way and this not only for the urban but rural people as well. They definitely have quite some potential for positive development. The quick, generous and worldwide help for the Tsunami victims in December 2004 and January 2005 is an example for positive possibilities. Without modern and instant media such a help could not be organized and supported in such a short time. The same holds for the earthquake in Pakistan in autumn 2005 or Indonesia 2006 and other disasters in different parts of the world.

Upcoming new technologies for the use of Internet also in rural areas point into the same direction. Already now some farmers in rural areas in Latin America can get information on market prices for their crops beyond their local dealers and even start to sell themselves their products internationally without the expensive middle man.(Hebblewhite 2005)

Another example is the fact that more and more people join the "blogging" wagon to express their ideas and concerns far beyond the traditional media. It is assumed that up till now there re some 14.2

million Blogs and they are growing by some 80,000 every day. (Palmo 2005) Some bishops in the Philippines have started their own online 'Blog" to reach out especially to young people but also to listen to their concerns.

The listening and viewing of Radio and TV programs from all over the world via Internet is another development which will probably change our communication patterns. How far will all this change our view and experience of other cultures and the people around us? Will this bring forth new possibilities for more harmony, understanding and reconciliation?

Not only young people are glowed to the Net so that they spend in a growing way more time on the Net than on Television. Also old and retired people get a new chance: instead of glowing into the TV-tube all day they can become active again through the Internet. This way they not only can stay in touch with family and friends through the interactive use of the Net. They also might create their own Chat-Rooms , their own prayer groups and thus might share their own life experiences to the younger generation. These potentials of the Net for elderly and retired people arte still the most hidden secret in the modern communications scene. They do, however, need a certain willingness of the elderly to also adjust to new technical developments and of the younger ones to help them to learn..

Modern communication connects more and more different cultures and people. The media have the potential to express but also influence opinions and feelings; they   can   help to correct misunderstandings and bring people together also over long distances. Modern information technologies have the potential to bring people out of their loneliness and connect them via email or Internet chat, "Blogs" or similar ways with people of same or similar interests. They can also contribute to deeper and better understanding of different religious beliefs and show the potential and role of religion in different cultures and societies in a new way.

The continent of Asia is in fact in the forefront of such developments. According to a study on 'New Media' of the London '*Economist* (April, 2006) countries like South Korea, Japan and Hong Kong are in this field even years ahead of the United States. South Korea became December 1, 2005 to launch terrestrial digital multimedia broadcasting (T-DMB) after having started already in May the same year satellite digital multimedia broadcasting. Since January 2006 "Koreans have been able to watch television broadcasts on cellphones, free, thanks to government subsidized technology" Since April 2006 the first wireless Internet service ("WiBro)" is available which makes it possible to stay connected to the Internet and download up to 3 megabits per second even in cars moving almost at highway speeds. "Experts say these are ultimately aimed at creating a ubiquitous computing environment, enabling people to move around and interact 'naturally' with computers embedded in their environment."(UCAN 2006)

A "New Culture"
When Pope John Paul II talks in his Encyclical Letter on Mission *Reeemptoris* Missio (1990) about a "New Culture" determined by communication he in fact continues and develops the considerations of *Gaudium et Spes*. He always had a special interest in culture. Already as auxiliary bishop of Krakow and participating in the Second Vatican Council he made a written intervention to the Vatican proposal for a council document on social communication stating that the cultural dimension of modern communication was not sufficiently considered. It is under the section on

"new cultural sectors" of his encyclical letter on Mission *Redemptoris Missio* where he develops his ideas further. In using the Greek word "Areopagus" he points to the fact that at the time of the apostle Paul (Acts 17:22-31) this place in Athens "represented the cultural center of the learned people of Athens" and concludes that "today it can be taken as a symbol of the new sectors in which the Gospel must be proclaimed". (37c) He sees the world of Communications as the "first Areopagus of the modern age."

John Paul II not only sees here the media as instruments for evangelization but rather as important elements in shaping a modern culture which he calls a "New Culture" of modern times. Such a culture originates from "new ways of communicating, with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology." Already *Gaudium et Spes* expected 1965 "the intense development of interpersonal relationships due to no small measure to modern technical advances."(No. 23) The "New Media", especially the Internet and the merging of different other communications means, but also the growing interactivity between the participants in the communication process are part of such "new ways of communicating". Thus the FABC Communication bishops added already in their final statement of their annual "Bishops Meet" on "Megatrends Asia" (1999) a new trend which they called "From Traditions to Options". While in the past young people grew up in traditions of society they now have many options and "in the modern communication situation, where the news is available to everybody at an instance, journalists and Church leaders are not any more just 'gatekeepers' who determine what reaches the audience. They must be 'guides' through the jungle of options, inspired by the principles and visions of Christian faith." (Eilers 2002b, 39).

"New ways of communicating"
New ways of communicating are also reflected in the fact that more and more *mass* media give way simply to *Media*. There seems to be "a shift toward the view that media communication rather than mass communication" will become the focal point also for communication studies. Though there will be still mass media events like the Olympics or the World Cup in Football also in the future, there is, however, through modern technologies a strong trend towards a more individualized communication environment. "Media producers will develop products tailored to smaller but more homogeneous audiences rather than to an undifferentiated mass"(Chaffee 2004)

New ways of communicating are also reflected in the way new technologies are used. The rapid proliferation of cellphones not only gives places with no phone lines access to the world but also changes the way people relate to each other. Instant text messaging helps top make and develop appointments on short notice and to inform about important events. They help to spread easily new ideas and can invite to common action on short notice which might end up in bigger demonstrations. In a further development images will be added to the text and thus will slowly develop into a total communication environment where everybody will be available any time anywhere. Text messaging also has potentials for pastoral and evangelizing ministry beyond traditional ways of communicating (cf. Roman 2005)

For the Internet academic scholars see three special functions of its use. It can be used: 1. as an information source, 2.as a communication medium with new channels of communication like email and 3. a virtual public sphere, where participation of groups of people takes place. (cf. Polat, 2005)

For academic studies and research the Internet is often helpful for first investigations. It can also substitute up to a certain point the traditional library. At the same time, however, it can be more difficult to distinguish between the quality of the Internet Resources and their reliability. The temptation for plagiarism and the simply copying of Internet texts is great.

New Technologies

New technologies are developed almost every day and they slowly but surely change our ways of communicating. This demands from people involved – and that is today almost everybody and not only the big media corporations any more! – the willingness to see new technical possibilities. In a broader perspective this means a certain openness and flexibility from the persons involved. Nobody who wants to be part of the modern society today can exclude her/himself from these new technologies, their use and influence.

New technologies include also the Internet phone services with voice and images. The growing independence from landline telephones and the availability of the Net even without any phone lines (Wi-Fi; Wi-Bro) covering a whole country like South Korea points in a further direction which will develop into new and more challenging possibilities for human society.

The success of the "iPod" is another element which has contributed to a completely new way of communicating which is called "Podcasting". Here the recipient herself determines what and from whom to download and which programs to listen to. The listener becomes the editor for his program which he can listen to anytime and anywhere.

All these new ways of communicating and new technologies have also great potentials for sharing Christian Faith and convictions Moving from the monolithic Mass Media to an interactive and participatory mode where everybody becomes his own editor and determines him/herself what and with whom he/she is communicating will be a special challenge also for Christian formation in Communication Education and Moral Theology (Ethics!). This are new potentials for sharing Christian faith and convictions with other individuals and with communities. Christian faith is communication. Here is a new chance to live such a call independent from big Media enterprises. Every Christian should become this way a 'cyber-missionary' fulfilling Christ's command to go up to the ends of the earth. It is like the first Christians during the time of the Apostles: wherever they were and whatever circumstances they were place into they used it as an opportunity to share the Lord and make disciples.

New Language

With the new technologies also the language of people and the use of word changes. Thus the omnipresent 'text messaging' via Cellphones in the Philippines has developed a use of shortened words and expressions which needs sometimes a special sense for the recipient to decipher.

'Podcasting' taken from Apple's successful I-Pod invention is a new word to distinguish itself from 'broadcasting' used for traditional Radio and Television.

The new technologies have and will continue to also create a new *Lifestyle*. Instead of waiting for the mail or the mailman the Internet is opened for the latest information and incoming mail – possibly with an immediate answer or reaction. Daily life will be more and more computerized and a German manufacturer has already developed a completely computerized kitchen where all activities are determined and triggered by a computer program.

New Psychology

Through the new ways of communicating and new technologies also our relationships change. We develop friendships and relationships through the Internet and these relations have no geographical limits. With "Death of Distance" being a reality they can easily cover the whole world. Emotions are created and reflected with people we might never see in the reality of life. We can even change our identity because in a virtual world no bodily presence is needed. We can express our deeper

desires and enact them independent from space and time. We establish relationships with people who might finally only be constructions of the mind or creatures of the curiosity of somebody somewhere in Cyberspace.. In such a change of identity men might become women and old might become young…

Online communities are created and online Churches become a reality. Online Pastoral care is available for everybody everywhere as long as a common language can be used. Convincing 'advertising' for Christian faith can take place and might reach people far beyond our own imagination.

Through the new technologies and ways of communicating also psychological blocks can more easily be overcome. Thus the Catholic Church in Germany experiences that a growing number of people who want to return to the Church take their first step through the Internet. Shame and other reservations are more easily overcome this way and the first steps can be done in a certain anonymity which is preferred to the direct personal contact. (Belzer..)

"Complex issue"
For Pope John Paul II the phenomenon of a 'new culture' which is determined by modern Communications is a "complex issue". He reminds us that because "the very evangelization of modern culture depends to a great extent on the influence of the media, it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teaching. It is also necessary to *integrate* that message into the "New Culture" created by modern communications." How to integrate the gospel into such a "New Culture" is exactly the challenge for the Church today. Since such a culture "originates not just from whatever content is eventually expressed" but from the new ways of communicating it is necessary to study these ways but also their limitations and their potentials for the Gospel. How to finally integrate the Christian message into the new Culture is the special concern.

For such an integration to take place we might consider steps like:

* To know more about and study more seriously new developments, new technologies and their impact on people and the potentials for sharing the Gospel.

* To develop an inner disposition of such an openness in people that which is not only determined by curiosity for new technologies but rather nourished through a deep spirituality which sees God at work in such developments.

* To do serious academic research in all fields of New Media to deeper understand their impact on society as well as to see their potentials for the Church

* To form and train young and interested people in the evangelizing potential of this New Culture.

* To develop a missionary spirit which is committed fully to the evangelizing and pastoral mission of the Church but at the same time integrated into the "New Culture" determined by communication.

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