

Suspicion or Development? The Operative Hermeneutics in Two Church Documents on the Media of Communication

By

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This essay is influenced greatly by Lonergan's insights on communication as found in his "Method in Theology" as well as some readings in contemporary hermeneutics, particularly that of Paul Ricoeur.

But even if Lonergan figures prominently in the reflection, the idea of "communication" as developed in this paper is not limited to the functional specialty in Theology that Lonergan conceived it to be. Rather, it is considered in a broader way: as a function of the Church to whom is entrusted the communication of the christian message; and of every christian who, even if not a theologian, takes his mission to proclaim the Gospel seriously.

The basic theme that underlies the whole reflection is: Communication is essentially correlative to Interpretation. Hence, every critique of the distortions in communication must be complemented by a critique of the distortions in interpretation.

The practical aspect of this work is the examination of two documents of the Church on the media of social communication in view of determining the different frameworks of interpretation operative in both.

I. COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY

Community, according to Bernard Lonergan's laconic description of it, is not just the aggregate of individuals located in a particular territory but the achievement of *common meaning*.¹ For Lonergan, the formal constituents of community is common meaning.

¹B. LONERGAN, *Method in Theology*, 2nd ed. New York, 1973, p. 79.

I could already anticipate the question: What is common meaning? Lonergan does not give a definition of meaning, because it is, like the notion of good, too concrete to be defined.² What he does rather is to outline the stages of meaning, the realms of meaning, and the process by which meaning becomes common. I will not delve into all these rigorous explanations of Lonergan but I will simply highlight those parts of his elaborations that are relevant to the topic at hand.

If the formal constituent of community is common meaning, we can ask two questions: 1) How does common meaning solidify a mass of individuals into a community? 2) And how does a community achieve, if ever, common meaning?

A. *Functions of Meaning*

To answer the first, we must examine the different functions of meaning. The first function of meaning is *cognitive*. It takes a person out of his narrow perceptualism where he experiences everything from the point of view of immediacy. This function transports him to a world, the adult world that is mediated by meaning. The second function of meaning is *constitutive*. As Lonergan describes this function:

“Just as language is constituted by articulate sound and meaning, so social institutions and human culture have meanings as intrinsic components. Religion, art forms, languages and literature, sciences, philosophies, histories are all inextricably involved in acts of meaning.”³

Meaning, then, constitutes an individual into a particular tradition. What he will become is to a great part determined by the meaning which came to him as part of his heritage. The third function of meaning is *effective*. Individuals and societies engage in operations which are not mindless. “What we make, we first intend”. The fourth function of meaning is *communicative*. It is in this function that meaning evolves to become common.

“What one man means is communicated to another intersubjectively, artistically, symbolically, linguistically, incarnately. So individual meaning becomes common meaning. But a rich store of common meaning is not the work of isolated individuals, or even of single generation.”⁴

For Lonergan, common meanings have histories. It is true that originally, they were conceived by single minds but they became common through widespread and successful communication. Through this process, continually checked and improved by education, meanings are gradually clarified, expressed, formulated, defined. Common meaning is vulnerable to both cumulative transformation and deformation.

²“The concrete is the real, not under this or that aspect but under its every aspect in its every instance.” *Ibid.*, p. 36.

³*Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁴*Ibid.*

In answer then to the first question, we can say that common meaning solidifies an aggregate of individuals into a community by introducing them into a world of common experience from which common knowledge can be derived; a world of common heritage from which common understanding can be developed; a call to common values, goals, policies which can elicit in them a common judgment or decision leading to effective action. All these processes and their effectivity depend to a great extent to *communication*.

B. Evolution of Common Meaning

We now proceed to the second question: how does a community arrive at the achievement of common meaning? Lonergan relates this to the process of communication, thus:

"The genesis of common meaning is an ongoing process of communication, of people coming to share the same cognitive, constitutive, and effective meanings. From common understanding, there arises common language, the transmission of acquired knowledge and social patterns through education, the transmission and diffusion of information, and the common will of the community that seeks to replace misunderstanding with mutual comprehension and to change occasions of disagreements into occasions of non-agreement and eventually of agreement."⁶

Obviously, such a process never ends. In other words, common meaning remains an ideal to be longed for, a goal to be achieved. Seen in this light, every community remains imperfect. Lonergan himself admits this especially in his discussion of society which, for him, is based on community.

"While the ideal basis of society is community, while society does not survive without large measure of community, it remains that community is imperfect."⁶

This is not, of course, a reason to despair. Lonergan simply expresses the precariousness of the human condition. And by emphasizing the imperfection of community, he thereby points to the need for its continuous renewal, for a constant endeavor to clarify, express, formulate, define common meaning. This can only be done through individuals, groups, and institutions that would labor to persuade people of the imperfection of the community, of the inadequacy of the common meaning so far achieved, and of the need for more effective communication whereby community is transformed and renewed. Indeed, people need to be reminded that a community coheres or divides, begins or ends, just where the common field of experience, common understanding, common judgments, common commitments begin and end.

Consequent to the above, it can be rightly said that community is a continuous process of *conscious* self-constitution.⁷ It is formed, developed, shaken or stabilized

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 357.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 360.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 81.

according as individuals and groups know, intend, and decide within the horizons offered to them by their particular culture and history. Such a process need not be deterministic because history and culture are not fixed and immutable matrices. Rather, they are to be conceived of as ever widening contexts which offer possibilities for transcendence. This is the reason why community and common meaning, according to Lonergan, remain to a great part imperfect. Their structures are such that process is not denied but rather affirmed.

Again, this process of self-constitution, consciously carried out, is dependent on *communication*: the communication of the level of common meaning so far achieved (exteriorization); and the conscious assimilation or critique or rejection of common meaning (interiorization). Of course, in the latter moment (interiorization), communication need not be conceived of as though following a unilateral pattern. Lonergan distinguished between several realms of consciousness, and it is precisely because of the variety of consciousness that it is ever more difficult to determine how common meaning precisely operate and is operated on by the conscious subject. Referring to the mass media, he says:

"It is the power of the mass media to write for, to speak to, to be seen by all men. (Through these means), meaning not merely differentiates into the realms of common sense, theory, and interiority, but also acquires the immediacy of the mass media and the moulding power of universal education. Never had adequately differentiated consciousness been more difficult to achieve. Never had the need to speak effectively to undifferentiated consciousness been greater."⁸

C. *Common Meaning and the Mass Media Ideology*

For Lonergan, the mass media can have the adverse effect of creating the illusion that common meaning in all its fullness has already been achieved, and consequently, that community is no longer an ideal devoutly to be wished but already a reality. The mass media in its present high-tech form could hinder, rather than foster the process of the interior development of common meaning by its canons of immediacy and uncritical perceptualism. Indeed, the mass media can substitute for common meaning the popular dominant ideology, majority opinion, "the way things are" and the like. What results is not a community but a mass of unthinking subjects who have been taught to equate meaning with sensation, philosophy with news-commentary, and life with fashion trends. The mass media of communication, originally designed to help man achieve common meaning and thereby attain to community, could in fact prove resistant to this primordial purpose. The difficulty lies to a great extent on man himself who, despite his boast to conscious intentionality, is in fact very vulnerable to conditioning and fits of mental lassitude. Lonergan offers a valid criticism to many modern men who have ceased to exercise their capacity to know and to think critically:

"It is only by knowledge making its bloody entrance that one can move out of the realm of ordinary languages into the realm of theory and the totally

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 99.

different scientific apprehension of reality. It is only through the long and confused twilight of philosophic initiation that one can find one's way into interiority and achieve through a self-appropriation a basis, a foundation, that is distinct from common sense and theory that acknowledges their disparateness, that accounts for both and critically grounds them both."⁹

Here Lonergan alludes to what can be termed as an epistemology of "either-or". Either theory born of philosophy is true and common sense false; or common sense born of ordinary experience true and philosophic theory false. This kind of thinking, fostered by the modern categories of media, in turn breeds the ethics of "either-or". Both of these are, in the words of Herbert Marcuse, manifestations of a one-dimensional consciousness, unable to perceive and to understand the existence of other realms of meaning because it has been too conditioned to think in a one-dimensional way.¹⁰

This frustration of communication in its interior aspect can also obtain in its exterior dimension. The democratization of the use of mass media and the almost universal scope of communication thus reducing the world into a global village need not automatically lead to common meaning and community. As Lonergan wisely observes:

"Discontinuities may arise. The better informed become a class closed in upon themselves with no task proportionate to their training. They become effete. The less educated and the uneducated find themselves with a tradition that is beyond their means. They cannot maintain it. They lack the genius to transform it into some simpler, vital and intelligible whole. It degenerates. The meaning and values of human living are impoverished. The will to achieve both slackens and narrows. Where once there were joys and sorrows, now there are just pleasures and pain. The culture has become a slum."¹¹

Through a different approach (hermeneutics of culture) but arriving at the same conclusion as Lonergan, and expressing his views somewhat more vehemently, Paul Ricoeur thus states:

"This (mass media ideology) is asked to justify the perpetuation of the industrial system, become an end in itself, or rather to deploy itself as a dynamic of means without any end. We can call this function of signification ideological to the degree that it tends to conceal the dysfunction of our social life in the name of the preservation of the industrial system and its expansion. As in the case of past ideologies, this functioning escapes the consciousness of individuals and groups and develops a whole set of repressive measures with regard to anything that might call into question, either theoretically or practically, the perpetuation of the system. . . This is how today we witness the industrialization and the manipulation of our whole cultural life."¹²

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁰H. MARCUSE, *One Dimensional Man*, London, 1974, p. 24.

¹¹B. LONERGAN, *Op. cit.*, p. 99.

¹²P. RICOEUR, "Ethics and Culture", *Philosophy Today*, Vol. 17, 1974, p. 24.

The crucial words are "dynamic of means without any end". This phrase summarizes what becomes of the means of communication when they are conceived of as independent of the ends for which they serve as means, namely: common meaning and community.

II. COMMUNICATION AND THE CHURCH

The Church, according to Lonergan, is the community constituted by a double process of communication:¹³

- 1) the inner communication of God's love
- 2) the outer communication of the Christian message

It is important to note that Lonergan does not consider the Church as already finished, or made. It is a developing reality whose "substance is the christian message enjoined with the inner gift of God's love and resulting in christian witness, christian fellowship, and christian service to mankind."¹⁴

This definition of the church is consistent with his definition of community whose formal constituent is not the numerical aggregate of people but common meaning. So, for Lonergan, the ground of being of the Church is common meaning (the christian message) which, enjoined with grace, announces what Christians are to believe, what they are to become, what they are to do.

The christian message then, functions according to the Lonerganian sense:

"It's meaning then is at once cognitive, constitutive, effective. It is cognitive inasmuch as the message tells what is to be believed. It is constitutive inasmuch as it crystallizes the hidden inner gift of love into over christian fellowship. It is effective inasmuch as it directs christian service to human society to bring about the kingdom of God."¹⁵

Correlative to this, communication is nothing but the leading of another to share in one's cognitive, constitutive, effective meaning. Thus, the Church process of development is clearly delineated:

"Since God can be counted on to bestow his grace, (Christians must be concerned) with the effective communication of Christ's message."¹⁶

¹³B. LONERGAN, *Op. cit.*, p. 361.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 363.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 362.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 361. I have substituted "Christians" for Lonergan's "practical theology." For Lonergan, communication is discussed in the context of his Method in Theology as one of theology's functional specialties. In this paper, however, communication is treated, not merely as functional specialty of theology but as a function of the whole Church which is entrusted with the preaching mission, and of every Christian who takes his christianity seriously.

A. *Classicist Preaching*

Regarding the communication of the christian message, Lonergan warns about the classicist style of preaching. He admits that when someone preaches the message, he necessarily preaches such a message as it has been developed within his particular culture. But here he makes the distinction between the classicist's and the pluralist's preaching where he rejects the former and advocates the latter:

"Now a classicist would feel it was perfectly legitimate for him to impose his culture on others. For he conceives culture normatively, and he conceives his own to be the norm. Accordingly, for him preach both the gospel and his own culture, is for him to confer the double benefit of both the true religion and the true culture. In contrast, the pluralist acknowledges a multiplicity of diverse differentiation of consciousness and cultural traditions. But he does not consider it his task either to promote the differentiation of consciousness or to ask people to renounce their own culture. Rather, he would proceed from within their culture and he would seek ways and means for making it into a vehicle for communicating the Christian message."¹⁷

For Lonergan, the classicist style of communication presents the christian message as something which disrupts an already existing culture, and thus the message becomes an alien patch superimposed upon it; pluralist preaching on the other hand presents the message as a line of development within the culture to which it is preached.

What happens if a particular culture has elements within it that render the message meaningless or mutilate it? This question, of course, should not only be addressed to cultures that are on the receiving end of the message. How about the communicator's culture? And so, for Lonergan, the process of going into another's horizon eventually leads one to rediscover, and hence criticize one's own culture.

III. COMMUNICATION AND INTERPRETATION

If Lonergan rejects classicist preaching, he thereby rejects too the classicist conception of culture. In other words, every culture, even what we call now as "christian culture" must be open to criticism.

This position has one very significant thing to say about how the Church's hierarchy communicate its commentaries concerning contemporary issues and controversies. It is true that such communications are always prefaced by the assertion that these are in accordance with the "Church's perennial teaching" as interpreted by the magisterium of the Church. But often, the emphasis is on the former (the perennial nature of the doctrine) and seldom on the latter (the interpretation).

If we follow Lonergan's logic, the communication of the message is inseparable with its interpretation. A community attains common meaning, not only

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 363.

through communication but through a process correlative to it, namely, interpretation. Interpretation of a particular message necessarily includes as context (of interpretation) one's set of meanings and values that informs his way of life (which is Lonergan's definition of culture). Hence, to criticize one's culture is to criticize one's framework of interpretation.

Let us put the case in another perspective. If the achievement of common meaning and community depends largely on communication, is their non-achievement due solely to distortions in communication? If today, in spite of the preponderance of the means of social communication, there is an omnipresence of conflict, misunderstanding, wars, and the like, is this anomalous situation caused by distortions of communication?

We have to answer in the negative. If community and common meaning continue to recede farther away in spite of the modern means we have today to achieve them, the cause is not simply the proclivities of communication media. Perhaps it is about time that we start to shift our attention to a critique of distortions in interpretation, rather than concentrating mainly on the distortions in communication.

Very simply, the problem of interpretation could be stated in terms of a common experience: what is said need not always express what is *meant*.

Lonergan further elaborates the complications involved in the apparently simple task of communicating and interpreting:

"At the present time, four factors have combined to heighten the problem of interpretation enormously: The first is the emergence of world consciousness and historical consciousness: we are aware of many different cultures existing at the present time, we are aware of the great differences that separate present from past cultures. The second is the pursuit of human science in which meaning is fundamental category and consequently, interpretation a fundamental task. The third is the confusion that reigns in cognitional theory and epistemology: interpretation is just a particular case of knowing, namely, knowing what is meant; it follows that confusion about knowing leads to confusion about interpreting. The fourth factor, finally is modernity: modern man has been busy creating his modern world, freeing himself from reliance on tradition and authority working out his own world-view and so re-interpreting the views held in the past."¹⁸

Of all those factors, the last is the most significant because the other three derives from it. So at present, modern man has a different framework of interpretation. What happens if the Church continues to communicate its message without taking into account the marked difference between its own hermeneutical framework and the highly technological one of the man whom she addresses?

The answer, of course, is what we witness today concerning modern man's response to many of the Church's pronouncements: ranging from utter indiffer-

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 154.

ence to misunderstanding. Certainly, there is need for the Church at present to examine what framework of interpretation is operative in its pronouncements and to identify and then to eradicate those elements in that framework that no longer facilitate her role as an effective communicator of Christ's message.

At this point, we turn to Paul Ricoeur's thoughts on hermeneutics.¹⁹ There is a proliferation today of various hermeneutical disciplines and this could be a clear indication that indeed, what is most needed today is not only a critique of the distortions in communication but in interpretation as well.

A. Hermeneutics of Suspicion or Development?

Paul Ricoeur mentions two forms of hermeneutics which are complementary in nature: a hermeneutics of suspicion and a hermeneutics of development.

"It is one thing to use hermeneutics as a weapon of suspicion. . . and it is another thing to use it as a preparation for a better understanding of what once made sense, of what once was said."²⁰

Hermeneutics of suspicion is diagnostic in nature. It diagnoses the failures of the past (as in historical criticism), the failures in personal development (as in psychoanalysis), the failures inherent in a particular society (as in social analysis). By itself, it could achieve many things, but for a real understanding of the reality being interpreted, this form of hermeneutics is insufficient because its starting point is a suspicion. It is negative hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics of development, on the other hand, affirms that inspite the failures, a real development has occurred. This is basically a positive hermeneutics, aimed to bring out the best in a particular reality. Let us examine two Church documents on the means of social communication, namely, *Inter Mirifica* and *Communio et Progressio*, to see what hermeneutics is operative.

IV. ANALYSIS OF TWO CHURCH DOCUMENTS ON MASS MEDIA OF COMMUNICATION

A. Inter Mirifica

This Vatican II Document issued on December 4, 1963, has raised, like the Document on the Church in the Modern World, some problems about the rendering into Latin of non-theological ideas used. This is a clear allusion to the problem of interpretation just discussed above: meanings which could not fit into former frameworks of interpretation. As Austin Flannery admits:

¹⁹See P. RICOEUR, *The Conflict of Interpretation*, edited by D. IHDE, Evanston, 1974; D. IHDE, *The philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, Evanston, 1971; D. RASMUSSEN, *Symbol and Interpretation*, The Hague, 1974; D. COUZENS HOY, *The Critical Circle*, Los Angeles, 1982; P.L. BOURGEOIS, *Extension of Ricoeur's Hermeneutics*, The Hague, 1975; J.B. THOMPSON, *Critical Hermeneutics*, New York, 1983.

²⁰D. IHDE, *Hermeneutic Phenomenology*, Evanston, 1974, in the preface by Paul Ricoeur.

"There is a special problem about the translation of parts of this decree. . . It concerns the presence of modern non-theological ideas and terms for which Latin words or phrases have had to be coined or assembled.

What has happened, one presumes, in the case of certain Latin renderings of modern words and ideas in this decree, is that an expert or group of experts decided, when the decree was being put into Latin or earlier, that on etymological grounds these modern ideas and terms were to be rendered into Latin in a particular way. But in the absence of usage by a particular community sufficient to fix these meanings, the *process can misfire*.²¹

The difficulty of always coming up with a document in Latin as the "universal language" of the Church, must have been considered by those who frame such documents as their "occupational thorn in the flesh." In an age of pluralism, even Karl Rahner adverts to the fact that it is quite unrealistic to continue to cling to the idea that there can be one language universally understood in the same way by all.

"However, much one must always strive to speak with one language, to understand each other mutually, these attempts have material limits today. The attempt to produce an absolutely homogenous theology from the point of view of terminology and the questions it deals with, accessible to all theologians, if it could succeed at all, would end up as the theology of a small sect, unable to address itself to its environment any more."²²

These words of Rahner, however, do not imply the negation of common meaning. What he denies is the illusion of common language which could imply an already achieved common meaning. Just as meaning evolves, so must its medium.

But that is not our main point at this part of our discussion of *Inter Mirifica*. Attention was called to the difficulty of rendering ideas into the Latin framework in order to emphasize the previous contention that our contemporary times complicate problems of interpretation. We now proceed with *Inter Mirifica*.

Immediately in the Foreword, we read elements of suspicion that some things could go wrong with the mass media:

"The Church, our mother, knows that if these media are properly used, they can be of considerable benefit to mankind. But the Church also knows that man can use them in ways that are contrary to the Creator's design and damaging to himself. Indeed, she grieves with a mother's sorrow at the harm all too often inflicted on society by their misuse.

"This Sacred Synod shares the solicitude of popes and bishops in a matter of such importance and feels that it is its duty to treat of the main *problems* posed by the means of social communication." (I.M. 2)

²¹A. FLANNERY, ed. *Vatican II, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, New York, 1984, p. 283.

²²K. RAHNER, "Authority after the Council", *Authority*, F.J. ADELMANN, ed., The Hague, 1974, p. 93.

This tone of suspicion that the media could be used wrongly, and that they pose multifarious problems for the Synod to treat of permeates the whole document. No wonder, the Council Fathers seemed very anxious to get it off their desk the moment it was approved. Who likes to read about problems, anyway?

The same hermeneutics is manifest in nos. 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13.

1. *The Parenetic Structure*

Delving deeper, we can even outline the typical framework of a church document through a study of the framework of *Inter Mirifica*. This document's parenetical structure is composed of alternating *ideal postulates*, *suspicion*, *exhortation*, not necessarily in this order. For instance:

"If the media are to be correctly employed, it is essential that all who use them know the principles of the moral order and apply them faithfully in this domain. They should take into account, first of all, the subject matter, or content, which each medium communicates in its own way. They should also take account of the circumstances in which the content is communicated – the purpose, that is to say, the people, the place, the time, etc. The circumstances can modify and even totally alter the morality of a production. In this regard, particular importance may attach to the manner in which any given medium achieves its effect. Its impact may be such that people, especially if they are insufficiently prepared will only with difficulty advert to it, control it, or, if need be, reject. (I.M. 4)

In this number, we see a typical parenetical statement composed of the three elements mentioned above. The first sentence is an ideal postulate. The second and third sentences are exhortations ("should"); and the last sentences are couched with suspicion. Since a parenetical piece ought to move people to action, how does it achieve such an effect, if ever? First, it presents the ideal postulate as the *norm*, which, even if it excludes reference to the ordinary world of practical attainment, could serve as a foundation for a resolve to effect a personal or communal transformation. To heighten the ideal, its presentation is coupled with a *suspicion* that the reason why people or the world is such as now is because the norm is not being observed, or the ideal has lost its power to inspire men, not certainly due to some fault of the norm but due to the weakness of men. Hence, the need for reminders, the *exhortation*.

Why is it that such a form of rhetorics seldom move people now? It can be because the norm, the ideal has in fact been presented that its meaning, though preserving its cognitive content, no longer contains its constitutive and effective as well as communicative dimension. In other words, it still means something, but no longer equal to man's concern.

Secondly, it can be because the suspicion is too preponderant to create a positive framework for development. It paralyzes, rather than motivates.

Thirdly, the exhortation is just founded on the expected good will of the listeners; on the hope that they will "mend their ways" after they realize of the

great difference between what they are now, and what they will be (the juxtaposition of the ideal and the suspicion).

Inter Mirifica and all other church documents with such a pattern of rhetorics are certainly using a framework of interpretation which would no longer be effective today. We shall now compare *Inter Mirifica* with *Communio et Progressio* to see whether the operative hermeneutics has changed.

2. *Comparison between Inter Mirifica and Communio et Progressio*

First, let us outline some very notable changes in the *wordings* and in the *order* in *Inter Mirifica* and *Communio et Progressio* which suggest a shift in the framework of interpretation:

(a) Wordings

Inter Mirifica

1. Man's genius has with God's help produced marvelous inventions from creation, especially in our times. The Church, our mother, is particularly interested in those which directly touch man's spirit and which opened up new avenues of easy communication of all kinds of news, of ideas, or orientations. . . These can rightly be called the "means of social communication."

Comments: Here, *Communio et Progressio* immediately put the media of communication in its proper context: *social communication*, and its goals, communion and progress.

Inter Mirifica

2. This Sacred Synod shares the solicitude of popes and bishops in a matter of such importance and feels that it is *its duty to treat of the main problems* posed by the means of social communication.

Comments: *Inter Mirifica* aims to deal with problems. Immediately, one who reads this line conjures up the prospect of solutions. *Communio et Progressio*, on the other hand, does not promise any forthcoming solutions, but humbly lays down its task which is one of *guidance*. The personalistic orientation is manifest.

Communio et Progressio

1. The unity and advancement of men living in society: these are the chief aims of social communication and of all the means it uses.

Communio et Progressio

2. The deeper understanding based on the teaching and spirit of this Council will now *guide Christians* in their attitudes to the media and will make them more eager to commit themselves in this field.

Inter Mirifica

3. The Catholic Church. . . believes that its task involves employing the means of social communication to announce the good news of salvation and to *teach* men how to use them properly.

Communio et Progressio

3. This Pastoral Instruction sets out basic doctrinal principles and general pastoral guidelines. It carefully refrains from going into minute details on a subject which is continually changing and developing and which varies so much according to time and place.

Comments: Whereas *Inter Mirifica* categorically ascribes to the Church the capacity to teach men how to use the media properly; *Communio et Progressio* admits the difficulty of ever coming at a comprehensive knowledge of a subject which is continually "changing and developing. . ." Thus, what the Church could give would be merely "basic doctrinal principles and general pastoral guidelines. We see here a framework of interpretation that is at once open to development and further interpretation.

Inter Mirifica

3. It is the Church's birthright to use and own any of these media which are necessary or useful for the formation of christians and for pastoral activity.

Communio et Progressio

4. For a proper use of the means of social communication is the *responsibility* of the *entire* people of God.

Comments: Xavier Rynne reports that Bishop d'Souza of Nagpur in India during his intervention at the discussion of *Inter Mirifica* regretted "the document's insistence on the rights of the Church."

Communio et Progressio shifted the emphasis from *rights* of the Church to *responsibility* of the entire people of God.

Inter Mirifica

4. If the media are to be correctly employed, it is essential that all who use them know the principles of the moral order and apply them faithfully in its domain. They should take into account the subject matter, or content, which each medium communicates in its own way. They should take into account the circumstances in which the contest is communicated – the that purpose, is to say, the people, the place, the time, etc.

Communio et Progressio

22. How can we ensure that this swift, haphazard, and endless stream of news is properly evaluated and understood? How, in a society committed to the rights of dissent, is the distinction between right and wrong, true and false be made? How, in the face of competition. . . are the media to be prevented from appealing to and inflaming the less admirable tendencies in human nature? How can one avoid. . .

Comments: Notice how *Inter Mirifica* sets out at once to bring forth its solutions in terms of ideal postulates and exhortations. *Communio et Progressio*, on the other hand, presents not problems nor solutions, but *difficulties* formulated in terms of *questions*.

Inter Mirifica

24. The name of the Lord will thus be glorified by these modern inventions as it was in former times by the *masterpieces of art*; as the apostle said: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever."

Communio et Progressio

187. The people of God *walk in history*. As they, who are essentially both communicators and recipients, *advance* with their times, they *look forward* with confidence and even with enthusiasm to whatever the development of communications in a space age may have to offer.

Comments: Nowhere can we see more clearly the stark difference in the frameworks of interpretation operative in *Inter Mirifica* and *Communio et Progressio*.

Inter Mirifica's historical consciousness is retroactive. It cites history by looking back to the static masterpieces of art. These are indeed witnesses to former glory, but they bring with them the idea of permanence, stability, a perfection that is fossilized, no longer open for a historical advance.

Communio et Progressio on the other hand, emphasizes movement. Man *walks* in history, he *advances* with the times, he does not look back to some remote glorious past, but *looks forward* to the future with hope and confidence. *Communio et Progressio's* historical framework is not one that is permeated by the category of 'the same', but by the category of the 'not yet' and 'from now on. . .' Indeed, it is a hermeneutic of development that is operative.

(b) Order

Inter Mirifica

24. Last Paragraph

Further, it invites all men of goodwill, especially those who control the media to use them solely for the good of humanity. . ."

Communio et Progressio

5. Foreword

This instruction, it is hoped will be well received by all those who are professionally *involved* in the field of communications and indeed, by all who in good will seek the progress of mankind.

Comments: The change of order is significant. Whereas *Inter Mirifica* considered the need for dialogue only at the last part of the document, almost an afterthought, an act of condescension to those who have the good will but not the authority to teach, *Communio et Progressio* placed the invitation for dialogue

immediately at the Foreword thus heightening its importance. Also, notice again the hermeneutics of suspicion at work in the former document. It used the phrase "those who *control*" whereas the latter document employed them more neutral terms "*professionally involved*" and positively invited all men of good will for cooperative endeavor.

V. CONCLUSION

We can cite many more instances from both documents which reveal their differences in the framework of interpretation. But the point in their comparison is to show that there has been a shift in the interpretative framework of the Church, especially as regards its analysis of modern phenomena. But still, the movement towards this direction is not constant. We see later documents of the Church as somewhat regressive, opting for a return to a framework of interpretation which is characterized by suspicion. This is understandable in the context of the limitations of human attempts to criticize honestly one's culture. It is difficult to get out of one's horizon especially if the other option appears to be full of uncertainty. Our minds have that affliction which one theologian calls, the "blessed rage for Order". But order can degenerate into system. And when our culture becomes a closed system, it becomes a slum.

The Church, itself a community in the making, always tending towards the fullness of common meaning which is not attained at any point of time, must continue to examine, not only how it communicates the message, but how it interprets this same message within a context that is fluid and resisting all attempts at terminal definitions: man's culture. The Church, then, needs to direct its attention not only to how it relates with the world at large, how it communicates with this world, but also, and more importantly perhaps, how it understands the world today. In short, what method of hermeneutics does the Church employ towards the world and its contemporary modernity? Is it merely a hermeneutics of suspicion? Or a hermeneutics of development? Or both?

One media analyst, obviously employing a developmental framework of interpretation, suggests an insight which can serve as a summary of this whole discussion on community, common meaning, the church, the christian message, all these vis-a-vis communication and interpretation:

"The ambiguities apparent throughout the television experience are not cause for unalloyed gloom; there is mystery swirling around the edges of materialism. All the perennial questions about meaning and purpose and destiny still hover waiting to asked, as the mass media thrust the world at us through our eyes and ears for many hours a day."²³

A balanced framework of interpretation will make us see in the modern means of communication today, not only distortions of meaning, but what Peter Berger calls, "signals of transcendence."²⁴ □

²³C. MORRIS, *God in a Box: Christian Strategy in the Television Age*, London, 1984, p. 220.

²⁴Quoted in C. MORRIS, *Op. cit.*, p. 219.