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**The Pope of the Mass Media: Possibilities, Limitations  
and the use of Mass Media in New Evangelization  
by Holy Father Francis**

Pope Francis was elected as a Man of the Year 2013 of the American *Time* magazine<sup>1</sup>. It is the first non-European pope since 1200 years, who took the name of humble saint and finally called for the healing of the Church. According to *Time*, what makes this pope unique is the rate at which he stirred the imagination of millions of people who have lost hope to the Church<sup>2</sup>. *NBC TV* on the daily *Today* program, talked with *Nancy Gibbs* – redactor of *Times* – where she admitted that pope Francis changed in an unusual way the tone and perception of the one of the world's most powerful institution<sup>3</sup>. Unlike his predecessor Benedict XVI, Pope Francis quickly won the hearts of the mass media in a few minutes to become the alleged „forerunner” of freshness and renewal in the Church. Shortly after his election to the Pastor of the Church, he agreed to a number of controversial interviews, which gained recognition in the world. To date, there have been numerous publications in which Francis is not afraid to consistently talk about difficult issues and current society: controversial moves surrounding gay marriage, euthanasia, abortion, celibacy or in vitro<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Time* magazine made used a portrait of Pope Francis made by Jason Seiler, on the cover from 23th December 2013 announcing to the Word person of the year. See: *Times*. Red. Richard Stengel. *Time* Inc. 12: 2013 p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. N. G i b b s: *Pope Francis, The Choice*. In: *Time* 12: 2013 p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. <http://poy.time.com/2013/12/11/pope-francis-the-choice/> (Source: 20.02.2015).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. D. R o s e m b e r g: *W niebie i na ziemi*. Translation by M. S z a f r a ń s k a - B r a n d t. Kraków 2013 p. 147.

## I. The New Evangelisation

The Catholic Church is one of the oldest, largest and richest institutions on earth, with more than one billion followers, but for ages has been weakened worldwide by corruption and scandals. Finally appeared the man who filled believers with hope for a better future of the Church. Observing the way Pope Francis enters into relations with the mass media, it can be seen that he uses them well in the profits of evangelization and bringing the Word of God to the worldwide view. Since 13th March when Jorge Bergoglio was elected for pope, he has led a world revolution, which is growing every day thanks to its direct and simple style of speaking and acting. The blog of the prestigious newspaper *Washington Post* touts a simple and direct language of the current pope, and states that he crossed the digital barrier<sup>5</sup>. The Internet market of ideas has given the Church a new online pulpit to teach the faithful, so Francis used his simple style, not only in terms of trivials, but also in the words that are used to spread the faith, remaining in sharp contrast to the rich theological style of his predecessor, Benedict XVI – and perhaps this was the perfect key in reaching for modern and lost people<sup>6</sup>.

But first: what exactly is the new evangelization and why this phrase is used so commonly? *The New Evangelization calls each of us to deepen our faith, believe in the Gospel message and go forth to proclaim the Gospel. The focus of the New Evangelization calls all Catholics to be evangelized and then go forth to evangelize. In a special way, the New Evangelization is focused on 're-proposing' the Gospel to those who have experienced a crisis of faith. Pope Benedict XVI called for the re-proposing of the Gospel „to those regions awaiting the first evangelization and to those regions where the roots of Christianity are deep but who have experienced a serious crisis of faith due to secularization. The New Evangelization invites each Catholic to renew their relationship with Jesus Christ and his Church*<sup>7</sup>. According to *United States Conference Of Catholic Bishops* the New Evangelization is about salesmanship, so when for example cardinal says the next pope has to be committed to the New Evangelization, therefore, what they mean is exactly that he should be a pitchman, someone who can attract people to the faith. So according to Croatian Archbishop N. Eterovic, who organized a synod of bishops on the New Evangelization, has defined it by three different kinds of missionary effort: as a regular activity of the church (a lifelong process for practicing Catholics), the mission *ad gentes* (directed at non-Christian people) and the last meaning, outreach those, who have become

<sup>5</sup> Cf. <http://nowaewangelizacja.org/media-papiez-franciszek-przekroczył-bariere-cyfrowa/> (Source: 20.02.2015).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Ibidem.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/new-evangelization/> (Source: 20.02.2015).

distant from the faith for some reasons<sup>8</sup>. Finally, each evangelization is called a new one – there is no term of old evangelization, because each evangelization is tailored to the needs of own time and period<sup>9</sup>.

## II. The New Evangelization and the Mass Media

Francis in his message shows that the development of transport and technology communication brings us closer to each other, combining more and more but unfortunately globalization makes us interdependent<sup>10</sup>. People are so accustomed to divisions and contrasts, that they no longer see that there is a growing, scandalous gap between luxury of the richest and poverty of the poorest<sup>11</sup>. In this kind of unjust world, the media can help us creating a renewed sense of unity of the human family, which urges solidarity for a more dignified life<sup>12</sup>. But are people willing to listen to each other and learn from each other? The media can help us, especially because interpersonal communication networks have reached a very high level of development, and the Internet creates huge opportunities to meet with society and solidarity between people – it is a real *gift* of God<sup>13</sup>. Pointing to the media as a gift, the Pope also indicates that there are problematic aspects, because the speed of transmission's information is greater than human capacity for reflection or judgment, not allowing for proper expression of themselves<sup>14</sup>. On the one side, the world of the mass media can help humanity to evolve, but on the other hand, can be treacherous<sup>15</sup>. The desire to use digital connections can cause dismissal from society, moreover it is important that there are still the one, who for various reasons do not have access to social media, so it threatening foreclosure for them: social ostracism<sup>16</sup>.

All these limitations causes that social media become the trophy of a human, not technology, so that to make positive increase in the digital society, people

<sup>8</sup> Cf. <http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/whats-new-evangelization-thing-anyway> (Source: 20.02.2015).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. M. P o l a k: *Od teologii do eklezjologii pastoralnej. Zagadnienia fundamentalne*. Poznań 2014 p. 13–15.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. F r a n c i s z e k: *Przekaz w służbie kultury spotkania*. „L'Osservatore Romano”. Polish edition 2: 2014 p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Ibidem.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Ibidem.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Ibidem. It is the first time the Pope ever has called the media a „true *gift* of God”. It is possible that through such techniques of expression, media often cite Francis, and the same he becomes their favorite.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Ibidem.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Ibidem. Basically Francis is similar here in his speech to his predecessor. Benedict XVI also had a habit to give both: the pros and cons of the media.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Ibidem: About the social ostracism repeatedly and emphatically said Benedict XVI. Francis continues his thought.

must rediscover the value of prudence and serenity<sup>17</sup>. We can learn to listen to others looking at the world through their eyes, appreciating values inspired by Christianity<sup>18</sup>. But how can we really be close to each other and how the message can be used as a authentic culture of meetings? To understand it Pope Francis explain that Parable of the Merciful Samaritan is a story about a man of communication<sup>19</sup>. The one that passes, it becomes twin as Samaritan approaching the half dead man<sup>20</sup>. To communicate therefore means to appreciate that we are human beings and children of God<sup>21</sup>.

When the main purpose of the communication is to encourage the consumption or manipulate people, we have to deal with the brutal aggression, so nowadays there is a risk, that some of the media will condition us so that we do not perceive our true neighbour<sup>22</sup>. People cannot live alone, locked in each other, they must engage in their digital Internet walks, because man needs to love and be loved<sup>23</sup>.

According to Holy Father Francis, the ideal transmission takes only free and open words, able to reach out to every human being<sup>24</sup>. It is a duty that should serve everyone who communicates in a truly responsible way, by performing three tasks: fostering words, opening and speaking to the whole, full person<sup>25</sup>. Pope calls for an obligation to protect the coverage of media from everything that it distorts and bends for other purposes, as is sometimes subordinated to propaganda and political ideologies<sup>26</sup>. What is conducive to the mass media verbal message is precision, courage to speak in the face, sincerity and freedom – it is really convincing then, but on the other hand caring for the tactical aspects, ruins the speech and makes it unnatural and not very communicative<sup>27</sup>. The Pope also commented the excess of slogans, which makes disappearance of thinking instead of energize<sup>28</sup>. Slander, libel and saying things only by half are the most

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Ibidem.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Ibidem.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Ibidem.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Ibidem. Jesus shows that the point is not to recognize what the other person is like, but the point is to become yourself like him.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Ibidem. Pope Francis likes to call this power of transmission as a *closeness*.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Ibidem.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Ibidem.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Taken from the audience of Pope Francis for Italian TV2000 station (5th December 2014). Assuming an Italian television station staff, Pope presented for further discussion of the mission of the Catholic media to social media. <http://www.osservatoreromano.va/pl/news/jaki-ma-byc-przekaz> [Source: 21.02.2015].

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Ibidem.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Ibidem.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Ibidem.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Ibidem. A common error is showing incorrect solutions by media: hasty pursuit of immediate solutions, not bothering to show the complexity of real life.

insidious sins of the media, which leads to believe in only a part of the truth and makes inaccurate judgment of the reality<sup>29</sup>.

Mass media have many opportunities to carry the truth, but often the main goal of communication is to encourage the consumption or manipulate people and this is a brutal aggression<sup>30</sup>. Thanks to Network witness of Christianity can reach the periphery, but the media neutrality is only seeming, so the personal commitment is the foundation of credibility<sup>31</sup>.

Francis sees great potential in the media, although he sees their advantages and disadvantages, he is not afraid to move out with strong statements, perhaps this is why Holy Father is so adored by social media. The Holy Father often repeats that having a choice between battered Church, which comes out to the streets and fights, and on the other hand the closed Church, which is sick due to the own affairs – he definitely prefers the first one<sup>32</sup>. Go out into the streets and open doors of the churches means here opening them on the digital world, for all the people to let them coming, no matter what their conditions of life is, and for the Gospel to let it exceed the threshold of the temple and go to all nations<sup>33</sup>. Internet becomes a field for action for all Christians at all levels<sup>34</sup>. In the age of social Network, Facebook, Youtube, Twitter etc. people bombard each other with religious contents, thinking that this is how the witness of the Christ should to look like. Meanwhile, the Pope Francis shows a completely different way. Christian witness can be implemented with a willingness to give of themselves for others, and the with patientfull search of human interest in the search for truth and meaning of human existence<sup>35</sup>. People have to be able to engage in dialogue with contemporary men and women to understand their hopes, needs, concerns, and preach the Gospel to them, so the dialogue does not mean giving up own ideas or traditions, but maintaining that they are absolute and the only one<sup>36</sup>.

For some people of the world the Internet is still an unfamiliar, extraneous and foreign life style of sharing experiences, so the Holy Father recommends: „Do not be afraid to live in a digital world”<sup>37</sup>. As shown above, Francis is not afraid of the new challenges posed to humanity by Internet nowadays. After observing their pros, it would be worthwhile to focus also on the cons.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Ibidem.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Franciszek: *Przekaz w służbie kultury spotkania*, OR n. 2(2014) s. 6.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Ibidem.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Ibidem.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Ibidem.

<sup>34</sup> According to the Pope, people are called to be a witness of the Church, which is the home for all, so social Network it is a place to give a hope for those who lost it.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Ibidem. Pope Francis quotes Benedict XVI.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Ibidem.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem.

Nowadays, the most modern media which are necessary especially for all young people, may hinder rather than help in the communication within the family and between friendship of the youth<sup>38</sup>. Media can impede, if they become a way of escape from listening to isolation from the physical co-presence, escape into the virtual and unreal world<sup>39</sup>. Because of that people can forget that silence is an integral element of communication<sup>40</sup>. Discovering that the meeting is the life-giving of humanity, people will be able to direct their relationship with technology, not to let it just to be blindly guided by media<sup>41</sup>. In this sphere, the parents are the first educators often lost without assistance, especially in a situation where they want to raise a child in a communication environment according to the criteria of human dignity which is so often gainsay by the mass media<sup>42</sup>. The family is not the subject, which shall be forwarded to the opinions or area where the ideological battle goes on, but the environment in which we learn to communicate in the vicinity and the entity that communicates<sup>43</sup>.

So in front of digital humanity there is a real challenge to re-learn how to relate instead of to produce and consume information only<sup>44</sup>. This is the direction to which modern mass media pushes people, for which the information is important, but is too often simplified, contrasting the differences in order to take a position on one of the sides<sup>45</sup>.

Father Francis meets with the media and just smiles – by his demeanor he changed fossilized image of the Church, which was seemed as an immovable<sup>46</sup>. In the difficult times for the Church Francis continues the work of his predecessor, Benedict XVI and also uses *Twitter*<sup>47</sup>. However, he designs to keep in touch with people by using a *Facebook* fanpage, which was an example for the modern

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Digital version of the message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 49th World Communications Day (2015). Communicating the Family: A Privileged Place of Encounter with the Gift of Love [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150123\\_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco_20150123_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html) (Source: 22.02.2015).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Ibidem.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Ibidem. Francis quotes Benedict XVI: *silence is an integral element of communication; in its absence, words rich in content cannot exist*. Benedict XVI, Message for the 2012 World Communications Day.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Ibidem.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Ibidem.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Ibidem.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Ibidem.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Ibidem.

<sup>46</sup> Year after year, people's hearts beheld Pope Francis as he truly is: „*The Pope who smiles*.” *Fioretti, the Little Flowers of Pope Francis* by Andrea Tornielli is the title of a book about „*The Pope who likes to smile*.”

<sup>47</sup> The official, latin *Twitter* account of Pope Francis. [https://twitter.com/pontifex\\_in](https://twitter.com/pontifex_in) (Source: 22.02.2015).

priesthood<sup>48</sup>. The Pope Francis shows everyone that in order to properly use the mass media, people must to be an authentic witness of the faith. The Pope is seen by countless people around the world as one of them, so just by looking at his hugs exchanged with patients at a meeting with the suffering and the children, or how much time he spends with people before and after Wednesday audiences, everyone can understand the uniqueness of this Bishop of Rome.

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<sup>48</sup> The Pope was officialy encourage by *Facebook* to join the world's largest social network, but as he declined that he will not join in, because there are too many opportunities for critics to post profane comments under the public profile. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/pope-francis-will-not-join-facebook-sticks-with-twitter/> (Source: 22.02.2015).

#### ABSTRACT

##### **The Pope of the Mass Media: Possibilities, Limitations and the use of Mass Media in New Evangelization by Holy Father Francis**

Shortly after the election as Pope Francis has been named by weekly magazine *Time* for Person of the Year 2013. In contrast to his predecessor, Benedict XVI Francis takes on the cooperation with the media actively participate. In dialogue with the world and with faithful it uses modern means of communication, such as *Twitter*. This article describes how to use the social media in Church by the track of Pope comparing various online portals: the online world is interactive, the most recent and the most popular, so therefore is an interesting source of views about Francis. It perfectly demonstrates how Francis uses the digital development for evangelization.

**Key words:** Pope Francis, mass media, evangelisation, new evangelisation.

**Słowa kluczowe:** papież Franciszek, massmedia, ewangelizacja, nowa ewangelizacja.