

*["A Challenge! To help discover, through the Means of Social Communication, besides the personal encounter, the beauty of all what constitutes the basis of our journey and of our life, the beauty of faith, the beauty of the encounter with Christ", Pope Francis.]*

# THE MEANS OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION AT THE SERVICE OF EVANGELIZATION

[A DOCUMENTED  
APPROACH]

# 1





# CONTENTS

<b>1. PRESENTATION.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3. THE MSC, A PERMANENT CHALLENGE .....</b>	<b>9</b>
Jesus comunicator .....	11
<b>4. THE CHURCH AND THE MEANS OF COMMUNICATION .....</b>	<b>14</b>
Communication since Vatican II.....	14
The development of the means of Communication from the standpoint of church .....	15
At the opening of the twenty first century .....	17
In summary.....	19
The evangelizing impulse in the means of social communication.....	20
The presence in the media of social communication: listening and welcoming the human drama .....	22
<b>5. THE DOMINICAN ORDER AND THE MEANS OF COMMUNICATION .....</b>	<b>25</b>
Means of communication and evangelization.....	27
The means of communication in the last chapters of the order .....	27
<b>6. THE CONGREGATION AND THE MEANS OF COMMUNICATION .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>7. CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>8. COMPLEMENTARY BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>36</b>



## 1. PRESENTATION

*“Go and make disciples of all nations...” Mt 28:19*

When we opened the Web page of the Congregation, we had hoped that we would be open to the Media, not only for an internal communication service which will enable reports from the different structures *to flow smoothly but also to have a new way to enter into conversation with the world.*

The General Chapter of 2009 had asked all of us to make an effort on this matter and had expressed the idea of a “project” which would propose ways to access this new “digital continent” so that we can adapt our mission of evangelization.

Today I warmly thank our four sisters who, thanks to the co-ordination of Sr. Maria Leonor Charria, councilor, accepted to respond to this capitular request. I can testify that they did it generously, by contacting one another for this common task which was entirely reflected and realized through the internet. They themselves can speak for the wonderful possibilities offered by this communication and also assess the difficulties that they encountered all along its realization.

Their investigation takes into account the reality of the Congregation and the long distance travelled through, to understand how the process of evangelization, contemplated through the Media, asks to fix our eyes on Jesus, the first evangelizer, the Word acting through the screen. During this time of the jubilee of the Dominican Order, this effort is united with all those who, by their presence carried the Word directly to the four corners of our planet earth.

The work of each one of the members of the group allows us to propose to all, through some “sub-projects”, the means that will enable us to progress in our awareness, realization of the Proposal and indispensable formation for a renewed evangelization.

Enjoy your reading! May it invite you to situate yourself in a realistic way in this continent of the Media, may it be part of our mission of evangelization and

participate in the exercise of charity that must be communicated to those who wish to continue to serve through all the means which are available in our time. In this common regard, let us listen to the words of Dominic in sending his brothers, “Go preach”, and that of Marie Poussepin, “carry the knowledge of Jesus Christ and His mysteries” and accept to be sent to discover and take our place in the world communication services.

***Sr. Monique Colrat, op***

Roma, May 4, 2014

## 2. INTRODUCTION

The world in which we live is in continuous change and this requires that we be more attentive to know how to communicate. Very few times in the history of humanity we have identified so many and so diverse changes in the life of persons and societies as at present. The social trends and the new technologies are substantially modifying our way of living, knowing, working, relating and consequently, our way of Evangelization. This asks the Congregation in a responsible manner to enter into the world of communications and to optimize the use of new technologies as instruments needed for mission.

This document is part of a Project agreed on during the XVIIIth Enlarged General Council held in January, 2013, in Cochabamba. This proposal is meant to be a concrete response to what has been manifested and requested in different meetings and documents of the Congregation, namely to enhance responsible and critical use of information technology in our mission of Evangelization.

The development of the Project was entrusted to a commission of sisters.<sup>1</sup> The part of the work that we present here following this introduction, is the theoretical approach, which was assumed and prepared by the group, as the framework of reference to support the proposal.

The document begins by presenting the Means of Communication as a permanent challenge, and then focuses our attention on Jesus the communicator of the Good News to human beings; more than the words that he transmits, He is the WORD.

Following that, we present the Church and the Means of Communication from Vatican II and the impetus given for Evangelization; this is the most extensive part of the document, because the writings and reflections on this theme are very rich and diverse in the Church.

Going forward with our reflection, we touch on the documents of the Dominican Order, emphasizing some declarations made on Means of

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<sup>1</sup> The commission is composed by Sisters María Leonor Charria, Gemma Morató, Jenny Patricia Obreque, Gloria Eugenia Piedrahita y Emilce Rueda.

Communication and its importance in preaching, especially what was presented at the General Chapters of the last decades until today.

Finally we gather together some orientations and calls made to the Congregation as a whole by the General Chapters and Enlarged General Councils up to the one of Cochabamba in 2013, which very explicitly asked for the formation of a team to elaborate a project on the Means of Social Communication in our mission of Evangelization; this will be presented at the 54th General Chapter, Tours, France, during the months of July-August 2014. At the end of the document we have drawn some conclusions.

Our intention is that this document will reach each sister in the Congregation, to motivate her and widen her horizon for Evangelization through the Means of Communication and thus, the Project on which this reflection is made, be assumed and applied in each of the structures of the Congregation.

Let us remember that the theme chosen by Pope Francis for the World Day of Communications of 2014: “Communication at the service of an authentic culture of encounter”, is a new invitation to open ourselves and to make ourselves ready for the encounter with the OTHER and with others; it is the essential element in all communication.

### 3. THE MEANS OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION, A PERMANENT CHALLENGE

The center around which revolves human existence is the ability to relate and to communicate, even though we may not realize it. When we are closed in our cultural world, we run the risk of undervaluing other cultural worlds. Thinking of this, we realize that in the last decades, social and cultural changes have been especially significant because of the turn up of new **Information and Communications Technology (ICT)**, and with the new ways of their use derived from the complexity of systems. Many of the innovations which describe this technological environment are oriented towards a wide concept of communication with the inclusion and visibility of social actors, hidden in the large shadow zones in our world.

Communication is a social essential process, a basic human need and the basis for all social organization. Any one, in any place and time could have the opportunity of participating in processes of communication and no one should be excluded of its benefits. This presupposes that any person may have access to the means of communication and be in conditions of exercising his/her right to freedom of opinion and of expression, including the right to search, to receive and to diffuse information and ideas through any of the means of communication, independent of national frontiers.

From 1989 to today, our societies have been surprised by spectacular innovations in the information technology realm, in that of knowledge and of communication. Our planet is gifted with a complex texture of communications, we move within a true net work and we are members of virtual communities.

Our society is defined as *information society of knowledge, of communication, of shared knowledge*. (A name given at the World Summit of the Information Society (WSIS) held at Geneva, in 2003). The presentation given showed how information and communication through the new technologies contribute decidedly to the expansion of the human conscience. They expand our field of vision beyond the space we occupy, the time in which we exist and stretch our

awareness leading us to look anew at our identity within the ensemble of the universe, that of the community and of the species:

*“We, the representatives of the peoples of the world, assembled in Geneva from 10-12 December 2003 for the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, declare our common desire and commitment to build a people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life, premised on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and respecting fully and upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights”.*<sup>2</sup>

Thus, we arrive to a particular awareness of identity. We don't settle for narrow identities, disconnected, extremely specific. The awareness of identity has rather become open, less demarcated, more relational, more complex. We are leading towards a world civil society, slowly becoming citizens of the world. This is the social efficaciousness of the Means of Social Communication, especially of television, which through the impact of the chromatic image, is taking away from the home, the Church and the school system the preeminence it had until recently in the field of education and of the formation of conscience.

The Means of Social Communication have become the most powerful and influential means, in the public life of a country as much as in the private life of persons and nothing escapes their remarkable impact. This compelling influence relates not only to basic necessities of life such as food, health and entertainment, but also, to behaviour, values, ideas and culture...

However, it is healthy to remember that the "means" are just means. That communication goes beyond them and even if it is true that in themselves the means are neutral, there is the risk of using them as successful means of domination and alienation. It is necessary to face the huge challenge which is to transform the extensive mass of passive television viewers into critically perceptive individuals, developing in them their discerning abilities. Only in this way will we arrive to de-absolutize and desacralize them. The entry into

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<sup>2</sup> World Summit on the Information Technology. Geneva, 2003 and Tunis, 2005. <http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/geneva/official/dop-fr.html>.

the information society implies a change in our era, comparable to that generated by the creation of writing and of printing.<sup>3</sup>

One of the great achievements of the new technologies has been to allow for greater leading roles to the public in the processes of communication. The technological progress have made of the media language a new word: "inter-activity". The users of media cannot be passive receivers any longer, but rather they can be actors and respond, express their opinion, select contents, value programming, interact...and become valid and active interlocutors.

It is what is called "integral journalism" as it encompasses media companies, journalists, generators of any information, listeners, readers, viewers and navigators.

## JESUS COMMUNICATOR

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The Good News of God to men is not about words but of the Word, a person, a man: JESUS. He is the way we have heard and known God. At the same time He is announcement and announcer, gospel and evangelizer, the Good News of God (Lk 2:10-11).

The Good News is not a speech but the life of a man, a life which is spoken in a language and a language of multiple expressions. When the Bible, especially the Old Testament speaks of the vocation of the prophets, it affirms that they are sent to speak, to make present to the people the concern and the love of their God. His voice, His word is at times a cry, a word marked by wisdom and impatience, is the word a God who does not accept injustice. This God communicates with His people, He is close and communicates through the possible means of their historical time: Abraham speaks with Him, listens to Him and is able to recognize Him in theophanies and to make new proposals (Gen 12: 1-4; 18:20-33). Yahweh speaks with Moses face to face as with a friend (Gen 33:11).

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<sup>3</sup> Ramírez, Socorro y Vieira, Edgar, "Comunicación y colectividad para Colombia", Policy Paper 18, Bogotá, Fescol.

The communication between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, even more, the Trinitarian communion reaches humanity through the Son who is the Word eternally "pronounced" by the Father and in Jesus Christ and by Jesus Christ, Son and Word made flesh. God communicates Himself and communicates His salvation to men and women. *"At various times and in various ways, God spoke to our fathers through the prophets, until our days, which are the last, He spoke to us through His Son"* (Heb 1:1-2).

Saint Paul, after having preached in numerous places, once he arrived in Athens goes to the areopagus where he announces the Gospel in the appropriate and comprehensible language of the place (cf. Acts 17: 22-31). The areopagus which represented then, the center of culture of the doctoral Athenian people and today, it can be taken as the symbol of the new places where the Gospel must be proclaimed.<sup>4</sup>

The first areopagus, -evangelizing space- of modern times is the **world of communication** which has unified humanity transforming it into a "global village". The social means of communication have reached such level of importance that for many they have become the primary formative and informative instrument of orientation and inspiration for personal, family and societal behaviour. For the poor majorities, it is the only manner of entertainment. The new generations especially grow up in a world conditioned by these media.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus disciples must be consequent with His mandate: *What I say to you in secret, tell it in the light"* (Mt 10:27) and *"Go, therefore, and announce the Good News to all peoples"* (Mt 28:19). We must follow the example of the first disciples who announced the message through the means of communication of their time.

In the context of his time, Jesus taught that communication is a moral action: *"Of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man draws good things from his store of goodness; a bad man draws bad things from his store of badness. So I tell you this, that for every unfounded word men will utter they*

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Redemptoris Missio, N. 37 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Idem.

*will answer on judgement day, since it is by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words condemned.” (Mt 12:34-37).*

They would also severely criticize those who scandalize little ones and assured them “it would be better thrown into the sea with a great millstone round his neck” (Mk 9:42; cf. Mt 18:6; Lk 17:2). He was perfectly sincere: a man of whom one could say “*in his mouth there was no guile*”; he insisted in the sincerity and veracity of others at the same time that he condemned hypocrisy, immorality and any form of communication crooked and perverse “*...say Yes if you mean yes, No, if you mean no, anything more than this comes from the evil one*” (Mt 5:37).

Jesus is the model and criterion for our communication. For those involved in social communication -responsible in politics, professional communicators, users, regardless of the role they exercise, the conclusion is clear: “*So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another ...Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up as there is need, so that your words may give grace also to those who hear*” (Eph 4:25,29). To the human person, to build a human community founded on solidarity, justice in love, to tell the truth and to set its final plenitude in God, has been and will continue to be the goal of the ethics of the means of communication.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> World Day of Social Communications, Jubilee of Journalists. Vatican City, June 4, 2000.

## 4. THE CHURCH AND THE MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

The Catholic Church considers that it is part of its mission to preach the message of salvation with the help of the Means of Social Communication and teaches men on its right use. In the Church, therefore, the **means of communications are conceived as a process towards communion**. Outside of this its involvement and its concern to reach many would not have sense. The new techniques in communication propose this to the Church in a dramatic and urgent manner; such that there is no other way than "to opt for them" so as to be faithful to its mission.<sup>7</sup>

To this need it is added a new factor, the boundless growth of the world population which exceeds 7000 million human beings. Only an intelligent, timely and massive use of the mediatic communication, without leaving aside other traditional forms, could arrive to such a vast population.

### COMMUNICATION SINCE VATICAN II

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Undoubtedly the situation of the Church regarding the MSC radically changed after Vatican II. Not only because of the Decree *Inter Mirifica*, but also because of other documents. The Conciliar Fathers saw clearly that progress and technology were already transforming the face of the earth. They especially recognized, that the development of technology was going to provoke chain reactions of unpredictable consequences.

The Second Vatican Council laid the basis for a new Theology of Communications in the light of the Ecclesiology of *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*, and made it possible for the Decree *Inter Mirifica*, in 1963, to institutionalize social communication in the Church, giving birth to posterior markers such as the Pastoral letters *Communio et Progressio* in 1971 and *Aetatis Novae* in 1992. All of this opened an era of ever greater achievements at all levels, making the Mass Media an integral part of the evangelizing action. Besides all this, The Pontifical Council for Social Communication at the end of the Twentieth Century, published the Document, *Ethics in Social*

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<sup>7</sup> Cfr. *Communio et Progressio*, N. 126.

*Communication*, 2000, "which aim has been to facilitate a right moral criterion in the use of the MC, varied and complex human activity where this may be the case and in which the ethic imperative is often subordinate to commercial interests". It is a precious and timely contribution to the humanization of the communications phenomenon.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MEANS OF COMMUNICATION FROM THE STANDPOINT OF CHURCH

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It is undeniable that globalization has gone beyond all of us with techniques ever more sophisticated in an environment and a permissive attitude which does not acknowledge frontiers in any area of human activity. All too often, *ratings* are the highest parameter. However, the Church often call us in its Documents, to put communication at the "service of the human person" and it reminds us that "*the means of communication are and will continue to be means, that is, instruments, available tools as much for good as for bad use. It is up to us to choose...*".<sup>8</sup> At the same time they pose questions provoked by the new technologies, in particular the Internet.

Keeping this problematic in mind, the same Pontifical Council for Social Communications, elaborated with the help of experts, two documents: *Ethics and the Internet* and *Church and the Internet*. With the first, the Church wants to contribute to the use of the new media, "two elements of great importance, its commitment in favor of human dignity and its long tradition of moral wisdom."<sup>9</sup> With the second, the Church wants to show its cordial acceptance of the same, affirming that "they are important for many activities and programs" such as evangelization, re-evangelization, new evangelization, the traditional missionary work *ad gentes*, catechesis, education, news, administration... and even "some forms of pastoral and spiritual advice."<sup>10</sup> John Paul II, anticipating his own publication had said that "*this could result of great help to pastors of the Church and to the faithful at the time of facing the many challenges of the 'emerging mediatic culture'.*"

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Ethics in Social Communications*, N. 29.

<sup>9</sup> *Ethics in the Internet*, N. 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Iglesia e Internet*, N. 5.

To the accumulation of data, which by its quantity makes it difficult to manage, the Church contributes the wisdom of discernment, so that the valid information may remain and be assumed. To the amusing and festive aspects of the means of communication, proper to their activity, the Church offers Christian joy. At the same time it wants to benefit from their positive aspects for its pastoral activity, such as the ability to announce the Gospel in a clear manner, incarnated in concrete situations, in the present time and announced joyfully, so that the message reaches people, animates them and stays with them. In the end it is of justice to acknowledge that **the Church has cordially opened itself to communication and its technologies.**

This "pedagogic" presence stands out strongly in Pope John Paul II's message, given for the World Day of Communications in 1999, under the title , "*The MSC, friendly presence for whoever seeks the Father*", is without doubt one of the pontifical messages more advanced on the subject, whose projection is difficult to measure... The means of communication, says the message, nourish themselves of the news, which is ephemeral and passing; the Church offers the means the weight of the "historical memory".

In the Conciliar Decree *Inter Mirifica*, the Day of World Social Communications was instituted, a day dedicated to instruct the faithful on their obligations regarding the MSC, to pray for them and to help them economically. Beyond the contingencies which inspired this decision, the fact remains: that the Church at the Council, maybe without explicitly expressing it, was initiating a "permanent lab" which has allowed her an active presence in the phenomenon of media communication.<sup>11</sup>

Every year on January 24, Feast of Saint Francis de Sales, patron of journalists and writers, the Pope sends out a message on the topic for the World Day of Communications. Since 1967 until the present, the messages as a whole constitute an important point of reference, they show that the Church, beyond the conditionings of the past, has become a dynamic, innovative and prompt worldwide instance to detect problems, to propose solutions and to point at possible plans in social communications in their dynamic media expressions.

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<sup>11</sup> *Inter Mirifica*, N. 18, 24.

## AT THE OPENING OF THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

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At the opening of the Twenty-First Century, on June 4, 2000, on the World Day of Social Communications, Pope John Paul II would say to the journalists: what is proposed here regarding the relationship between the Church and social communication is valid for those who work in mass media communication and also for all those called in some way to communicate the message of salvation and I start with a general affirmation: today the Church has a clear and profound conscience of what communication means in regards to the fulfillment of its mission in the world. She has been created to communicate the Gospel to everyone and at all times.<sup>12</sup> That is the sign which identifies her and were it missing, it would not be the Church of Christ. Today that conscience is urged by the surge of new technologies, the MSC which amplify communication to planetary levels.

In the same way, speaking of the new play-stages of today's society, the Pope identifies the MSC as the "first areopagus" in which grow new ideas, behaviors and attitudes which are unifying the world and which have given birth to the modern culture of communication. A fact, which at the same time it offers the Church new possibilities, it also shows new challenges difficult to sort out. These challenges, however, constitute a providential thrust which remind her of her imperative and essential strength which she cannot evade, because she is by definition, a community called to create communion through communication....This precisely explains and justifies its permanent concern to discover throughout the centuries, directions, languages and appropriate channels to communicate the Gospel of salvation to all nations.

In the apostolic letter of January, 2005, to those responsible for social communication, John Paul II says:

*"The rapid development of technologies in the field of the means of communication is surely one of the signs of progress of today's society. The Church is not only called to use the means of communication to spread the Gospel, but today more than ever, to integrate the message of salvation into the "new culture" that these powerful means create and amplify. The Church advises that the use of the techniques and*

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, N. 14

*technologies of contemporary communication are part of its own mission in the third millennium".<sup>13</sup>*

It is thus, that when a new impulse is to be given to the evangelizing action of the Church, the Document from the Synod of Bishops presents new borders on the communication stage:

*"(...) The sixth stage of evangelization, the stage of communication, offers today huge possibilities and represents a great challenge for the Church... At first it was characteristic only of the industrialized world, today it is the stage of a globalized world which may influence vast portions of the countries in view of development. There is no place in the world which may not be reached and which may not be under the influence of the media and digital culture which imposes itself ever more in "the place" of public life and of the social experience. It is enough to think in the extensive use of the informatics web".<sup>14</sup> "Our perception of ourselves, of others and of the world depend on the influence that such technologies exercise. These and the communication space they generate must be positively considered, without prejudices, as resources, although keeping a critical view and an intelligent and responsible use".<sup>15</sup>*

We move then in the era of the great scientific and technological advances; the human being is interconnected, however, he has not experienced before to this degree, solitude and lack of communication. The Church asks herself and asks us: *"Is the audience of the future a multitude of audiences of single persons? Could the web of the future, instead of being a global, community be one of isolated persons, of human bees in their cells, which interact with data and not directly with each other? What will it be for solidarity, or for love in a world like ours?"*.<sup>16</sup>

On July 27, 2013, In the midst of the World Youth Gathering, Pope Francis visited a Brazilian radio station, Radio Catedral, the official radio of the Archdioceses of Rio de Janeiro and spoke saying:

*"I am looking at the radio and I see that the means of communication are so important today. I would say that a Catholic radio today it is the closest pulpit we*

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<sup>13</sup> Apostolic Letter, January 2005, those responsible for Communications, N. 1, 2.

<sup>14</sup> Document from the Synod of Bishops: "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith", 2012, N. 59.

<sup>15</sup> Idem, N. 60.

<sup>16</sup> Pontifical Council for Social Communication. "Ethic in Social Communications." Vatican City, June 4, 2000. World Day of Social Communications, Jubilee of Journalists, n. 29.

*have. It is where we can announce, through the radio, the human values, religious values and especially announce the Lord Jesus Christ. To give to the Lord that grace of giving him place in our homes. So I greet you and thank you for all the effort which makes this Archdiocese to have a radio and for maintaining a radio with such a large range".<sup>17</sup>*

Already before, in a gathering with the representatives of the MSC, in the Room Paul VI, in Rome, Saturday, March 16, 2013, the Pope had said:

*"Be sure that the Church, gives great attention to your dedicated commitment; you have the ability to gather and to express the expectations and exigencies of our time, to offer the elements for a reading of reality. Your work requires study, sensitivity and experience, as in so many other professions, but this implies a special attention in respect to truth, kindness and beauty; and this makes us particularly close, because the Church exists precisely to communicate that: Truth, kindness and Beauty "in person". This should remain clear for everyone, we are called not to show ourselves but to communicate that existential triad which form together, truth, kindness and beauty".<sup>18</sup>*

## IN SUMMARY

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A simple quantitative analysis shows that our Church has taken seriously modern communication and its presence in the great topics debated today: man, woman, family, peace, human rights, defense of life, solidarity, social justice, ecology, children, youth, the elderly, migration, publicity, consumerism... At all times the Church reaffirms the aesthetic which makes possible a real human communication and the defense of human dignity, without forgetting man's definite end. This positive attitude goes closely linked with the impassionate defense of local cultures which must be maintained and not absorbed and made volatile, in the vastest and most imperious phenomenon of globalization.

The Church cannot give up being present at a cultural situation marked by the phenomenon of mass communication. To give this up would be a lack of love for Jesus Christ redeemer of man and to the history of salvation which He

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<sup>17</sup> "Radio Catedral", Río de Janeiro. Saturday July 27, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Pope Francis to Journalists, Rome, Vatican, March 16, 2013.

initiated. If we desire to offer the most valuable we have, we cannot ignore the features which configure the world in which we live. There was a time when men were in a majority analphabet and the Church invented romantic art as a means to communicate the message. Then the people was educated through liturgy and art. Christian tradition has always been rich in signs and symbols: the cross, the icons, the crib, the images of Our Lady, the stain glass and the paintings in churches... A substantial part of the artistic patrimony of humanity has been realized by artists and musicians who have tried to express the truths of the faith. Today the challenge is for us: we need to introduce the content of the message of the Christian experience in the context of the global communication, of the hypertext, mixed with word and image.

The ability to use the new languages is necessary as much to be with the times, as to allow that the infinite richness of the Gospel may find forms of expression which may reach the minds and hearts of everyone. In the digital context, the written word is often found accompanied of images and sounds. An efficient communication such as the parables of Jesus has to stimulate the imagination and the affective sensibility of those we want to invite to encounter the mystery of the love of God. With Pope Francis we have to ask ourselves: *“Are we also able in this field of action to bring Christ, to bring others to encounter Christ? To walk with the existential pilgrim as Jesus did with those at Emmaus, setting their heart afire to recognize the Lord? Are we able to communicate the face of the Church as the “house” of all?”*.<sup>19</sup>

## THE EVANGELIZING IMPULSE IN THE MEANS OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

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John Paul II, speaking of the “New Evangelization”, affirmed that “it must be new in fervor, in its expression and methods”. We note that even if this applies to every form of evangelization it is so in the first place in the evangelization through the media which is in itself defined by “uniqueness”. Even if it seems paradoxical, “newness” defines it better.

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<sup>19</sup> Talk from Pope Francis to the 80 participants to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, September 23, 2013.

Pope Benedict XVI puts it as follows: *“In fact, the new digital technologies are provoking deep transformations in the models of communication and in human relations. These changes stand out more among the young who have grown up in close contact with these new technologies of communication....These technologies are a true gift for humanity...”*<sup>20</sup>

The new possibilities of announcing the Christian message are not linked to just a multiplier and amplifier effect of the MSC. The challenge goes deeper, we need to well understand this culture so as to be able to evangelize it. Early Christianity was able to do that synthesis already started by Saint Paul, assuming the challenges and risks linked to the encounter of the Gospel with the Greco-Roman culture. They are in reality the same risks of the Incarnation. The most important is to enter into that culture; to move through it with the Gospel without giving up the integrity of its contents and without neglecting a healthy and watchful critical sense and a continued discernment.

The message of Benedict XVI for the World Day of communications 2010, pointed at: *“The pastoral approach in the digital world: the new means at the service of the Word have placed us in the midst of a new world, or at least of a new culture which until recently was taking shape as such. The means of communication have generated a man with a very concrete way of being and of acting. It is to this man that the efforts of evangelization must be directed.*

The use of the means of communication to which Benedict XVI invited us, are not a question of fashion or of remaining out of phase, but it is rather, of the expression of the evangelizing impulse which must move all Christians and especially consecrated persons, to look for the appropriate means to attain that the Word may reach all men, in all places in a creative way.

To evangelize culture requires first of all, to be oneself evangelized and to feel as one's own the needs of all those who navigate the web.<sup>21</sup> The evangelization of the media, of the digital culture, starts from the adequate knowledge of that culture. It is not the same to dialogue on the web than face to face. It is not the same to have an impersonal message than a non-verbal gesture

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<sup>20</sup> Talk from Pope Francis to the 80 participants to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, September 23, 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Message to the Roman Curia at the exchange of Christmas Greetings, December 21, 2009.

transmitted by a smile, a facial assent, and expression of amazement. Whoever wants to evangelize the world of the web must be conscious that he will be immersed in a new culture, very different from the culture of the real world. The study of this media phenomenon of the digital era, should be part of his preparation before he launches into the evangelization of this medium. The means of social communication do not do anything in themselves, they are only instruments, tools which people choose to use in one way or another. Reflecting on the means of social communication we need to honestly face the most essential question presented by technological progress: Is the human person because of these means *"a better person, more spiritually mature, more aware of the dignity of his/her humanity, more responsible, more open to others, particularly to the weakest and most needy, more willing to give and to render help to everyone"*.<sup>22</sup>

Consecrated Life finds in the Society of Information and learning, a new "habitat", a new way of being in the world and in that same "habitat", it wants to situate itself at the border and in liminal spaces. From that standpoint, each of the charisms may make its prophecy heard and prophetically serve.

## THE PRESENCE IN THE MEDIA OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION:

### LISTENING AND WELCOMING THE HUMAN DRAMA

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At the time of giving value, of discerning the content of the media and of participating in them, it is essential to consider the central questions and the yearnings of man, his need for meaning in each of his relationships and experiences; this should be the primary objective of all communication, said Pope Francis in one of his homilies before the Angelus: *"...the Christian is someone who brings within him a great and deep desire to meet his Lord along with his brothers and companions on the way. And all of this is summarized in a famous saying of Jesus: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Lk 12,34).*<sup>23</sup> Therefore, **it is a question of being a companion to man in his search for meaning and in his search for God.**

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<sup>22</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptor hominis*, n. 15.

<sup>23</sup> <http://es.radiovaticana.va/news/2013/08/11>.

There is no doubt that an adequate response implies to generate a new public discourse in which it is clear that the intelligence of faith is translated into a wider and deeper reality. We cannot be contented with denouncing the evils of the times, or with an apologetics, which terms are no longer understandable to a large social segment. It is necessary to show the relevance of the faith to face the problems of today's man by being in the debate sympathetically and without complexes. This has to be done by making good use of our own means and looking for a space in those places which are not our own, earning that space by our interest and the quality of our presence. Responding with audacity to the challenge to break barriers and trenches, to foster relationships without taking anything for granted, to leave behind as much prepotency as complexes.

This will also mean the effort to formulate the message we want to transmit according to the form which the means demand; to adapt the form does not mean to reduce or to trivialize the content of the message. It is to perfectly realize this adaptation in terms of time, of an informative agenda, in the format and the technical capacity ... without diminishing what we pretend to communicate.

For the majority of telespectators, radio listeners, film lovers, music lovers, net surfers... The means have taken on an "educational" protagonism totally disproportionate, and they have assumed it because of their own ability to influence, but especially because of the vacuum left by the educational environments of first rank such as family, school, the Church or religious communities. Persons are often seen as isolated, deprived of strong links able to transmit truths and reasons, and in that isolation and that lack of "tradition", the means become the only window to look at a reality which changes vertiginously. They are the only window and also the last word about this reality. The answer to this problem cannot come from the means themselves; but one has to question from the greatest possible plurality, to learn criteria, to have at one's disposal, from other valuable sources, the information submitted to the test of critique and to the opinion coming from them.

In the religious field, for example, the majority of journalists, seem to think they know what is the faith and what is the Church, and what they think of these does not please them much because their image is completely distorted.

The Means have to recognize and to respect the historical value as well as the present which is significant for the Church and the Church needs to accept that she needs to play the game in the area of social communication with all the risks and possibilities which these entail.

## 5. THE DOMINICAN ORDER AND THE MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

The Order of Preachers which participates in the Apostolic Life of the Church, must always be in the action of mission, and must situate itself at the frontiers. The priority of priorities for the Order is preaching and full dedication to the integral evangelization of the Word of God. To achieve this end the Order has reaffirmed in the last years four priorities. These cannot be separated from each other and much less be chosen one over another. On the contrary, they complement each other, since each one responds in a different way to the most pressing need of today's population in what concerns the preaching of the Word of God. Neither are they a novelty but they belong fully to the charism and tradition of the Order. In the life of Saint Dominic, in the life of the brothers of the Thirteenth Century, in that of the brothers of the Sixteenth Century who arrived at Latin America and the Near East, in modern times... The four priorities are certainly the fruit of the original grace. These are:

- a) Catechesis in a de-Christianized world.
- b) Evangelization in the context of diverse cultures.
- c) Justice and peace.
- d) Human Communication through the means of social communication.<sup>24</sup>

The means of communication have revealed to us with great evidence, "the drama of our times": the rupture between human culture and the gospel message, between the human word and the word of faith,<sup>25</sup> since we are immersed in a world in which each person is a communicator of life or of death.

The Dominican friars know this and so they preach the Word of God in every possible manner: liturgy, parish missions, retreats, occasional conferences, talks at religious congresses, street preaching, teaching, writing books; **through art especially films, television, theater and they make use of the advantages offered by the internet and other advances of the digital era,**

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.domingo.org.ar/itinerarios>.

<sup>25</sup> Evangelii Nuntiandi, N° 20.

without ever sacrificing the indispensable role of personal presence which in communication can become true communion.<sup>26</sup>

Our message, as any other message, needs a support: the voice, the writing, the image. The means of communication are as much the speakers, the computer, the radio, the newspaper, as are the audiovisual media of television or film, media which do not cease multiplying, perfecting themselves, while at the same time they become popular. However, the mass media are more than support, they have shaped a new culture with a new language. If it is evident that to evangelize the new peoples it is indispensable to first learn their language and to initiate oneself in their culture, this demand also holds valid for the new culture of the means of communication.<sup>27</sup> When we speak of "re-evangelizing", it is especially of evangelizing a new culture. In particular, the young, born into this culture, are the new "cumans".

Besides, certain means of communication allow bringing the gospel message to everyone without distinction of class and to reach those who are far from the Church. For the preacher or for the theologian, to learn this new language so as to understand the new culture, is to multiply almost indefinitely the efficacy of his work. This can differ depending on countries or regions and depending on the means of communication.

Consequently, formation in the good use of the means of communication is not only technical learning. Each one has formed his/her spirit, heart and judgment through the great works of his/her own culture. We cannot ignore the masterpieces of the new culture of the means of communication. Just as all others, this culture creates for man new ethical problems. It is essential, therefore, to form ourselves in critical approximation regarding the means of communication. Because of the importance of this topic, since a few years back, several General Chapters have made statements in regards to the Means of Social Communication (MSC).<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.op.org/es/content/predicacion-dominicana>.

<sup>27</sup> General Chapter, Quezon City, 28.5.

<sup>28</sup> At the door of the Twenty-first Century, World Day of Social Communications, on June 4, 2000, Pope John Paul II said to the journalists: "what is proposed here regarding the relationship between the Church and social communication is valid for those who work in mass media communication and also for all those called in some way to communicate the message of salvation and I start with general affirmation: today the Church has a clear and profound conscience of what communication means in regards to the fulfillment of its mission in the world. She has been born to communicate the Gospel to everyone and at all times: that is the

## MEANS OF COMMUNICATION AND EVANGELIZATION

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To respond to the urgency of Evangelization, “we encourage the friars to use the means written or electronic to announce the Gospel, thus you will be bearers of hope”<sup>29</sup>.

“(…) We ask that the means of communication be a support and a participation in the pastoral to indigenous peoples and those in the fields, and that they be used to bring the Gospel to places we cannot reach otherwise and, we invite the brothers to give a special attention to the young whose language is the one of the means of communication so as to bring to them the message of the Gospel and to make them discover hope through that language, the only one which seems closer to them. Also to contribute, through the means of communication in the work of inculturation, defending cultures and values of threatened peoples..

That through the means of communication, the friars offer help in education, formation and the defense of human rights. That the means of communications be at the service of everyone and in that way be a prophetic sign of the dominican spirit. As the Chapter of Oakland put it,<sup>30</sup> that the word of the PRACHING of the brothers and sisters be a free word, conscious, convincing and a carrier of a new vision”.

Evangelization through the media cannot be understood by us, except in community. Because of that a serious collaboration is necessary at the interior of the communities, with the sisters and the laity of the Dominican Family, at the request of the local Church.

## THE MEANS OF COMMUNICATION IN THE LAST CHAPTERS OF THE ORDER

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Father Carlos Aspiroz, previous Master General, had expressed himself on the presence of the Order in the vast Means of Social Communication:

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sign which identifies her, were this missing it would cease being the Church of Christ. Today this conscience sees itself pressed by the irruption of new technologies- the means of Social Communication, which amplify communication to planetary levels." n. 28-32; Walberberg, 17B 4; Roma, 255-268; Ávila, 72-11; Oakland, 58-61; 68.8; 100-103.

<sup>29</sup> General Chapter, Oakland, 260.

<sup>30</sup> General Chapter, Oakland, 68. 8.3.

*"(...)The young friars... try to respond to the challenges of the mission through the new ministries and areopagoi, in particular the one offered by the modern means of communication. They are friars who belong to a generation which has brought along a huge cultural change! We are witnesses of the new ways of preaching through the internet, video-conferences, blogs, fori, etc. We cannot but support those initiatives".<sup>31</sup>*

In the minutes of the General Chapter of Elections of the Order, in the section on study the importance of the Media for preaching is reiterated: *"Previous General Chapters of the Order have identified the proclamation of the Gospel through the various technological communication media... as a priority of the Order."*<sup>32</sup>

At this same Chapter, the friars are invited, in collaboration with other members of the Dominican Family, to use the media technology ... to expand the limits of their education apostolate and to reach to those who otherwise could not benefit from it. Besides, there was a congratulation extended to the brothers, sisters and laity of the Order who had developed those creative and innovative forms of preaching through the internet: retreats, distance education, consultation... and it is recommended that each group in the Order offer opportunities to the brothers in formation to develop their abilities in the responsible use of modern technology and provide for the development of their apostolate in the communication media.<sup>33</sup>

Father Bruno Cadoré, Master General, in his report at the Chapter of Definitors at Trogir, referring to the wide panorama presented by the Media, even speaks of a sixth continent, taking up the expression used at the recent Synod on the New Evangelization:

*"In all the provinces I have visited, the friars consider that the new webs of communication constitute a great challenge for our preaching and that, beyond the new horizons open to communication by this technological development, it is a new world ("sixth continent") which the Order must learn to enter and to preach in it. In*

<sup>31</sup> Report on the State of the Order by the Master General Carlos Alfonso Azpiroz, on "Apostolic Life and Mission".

<sup>32</sup> Acts from the General Chapter of Elections of the Order, ns. 122, N 123, N 137, N138, N 37, N 56. Roma del 1 al 21 de septiembre de 2010: AGG 2001 Providence, nn 95-99 y 201; AGG, 2007, Bogotá, n 111; AGG 1984 Cracovia, nn 93-94.

<sup>33</sup> Acts from the General Chapter of Elections of the Order, ns. 122, 123, 137, 138, 37 and 56. Rome, 1-21 of September, 2010.

*reality, the Order is already doing it, as we witness it for example, in the number of our brothers in the social webs, or also in one or another collective initiative. How to avoid that this does not individualize even more each one's preaching? How to bring together a reflection on the cultural and anthropological challenges of these new webs, and to exercise in them a real creativity of the apostolic encounter?"<sup>34</sup>*

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<sup>34</sup> Of the Relation of the Master of the Order, Fr. Bruno Cadoré. Chapter of Definitors, Trogir, Croacia. July 22 - August 8, 2013.

## 6. THE CONGREGATION AND THE MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

The Congregation has reiteratively called to reflection on the MSC and to take a position regarding them. Because of this, following the slogan of Dominic of Guzman "*Speak to God and of God*", we can ask the Holy Spirit, communicator *par excellence*, to help us to understand how to communicate to God with men, and to men with God and among themselves, through the wonderful tools of social communication.

Even more, the mission in the Dominican Order is, "*to give oneself to the total evangelization of the Word of God*". To achieve this according to the Dominican spirit we are to continually search for the "*new places for evangelization*" which today has a name: The Means of Social Communication, or new platforms of communication.

Our Congregation, as all members of the Dominican Family, exists for preaching: to "*speak to God and often to speak of Him*".<sup>35</sup> Our *raison d'être* is "*to take wherever we are called, the knowledge of Jesus Christ and His mysteries*".<sup>36</sup>

Sister Ines Mercedes Mejía Toro, Superior General (1979-1994) said in her Report to the 50th General Chapter: "*The history that many sisters continue to write today with the same simplicity and conviction, proclaims with evidence that it is always the "the time" for the evangelical response, and that today's world, as at other times in history, is the place for the apostle, the witness and the herald of the Gospel.*

- *Which are our areopagoi?*
- *Who are our "cumans"?*
- *Where are the miseries of Sainville in the Fourth Century?"*.<sup>37</sup>

Already in 1998, at the 12th Enlarged General Council (EGC) of Cali, Colombia, in a critical analysis of the situation in the world, it was said to us: "*The new technologies of communication and of information, also engender new forms*

<sup>35</sup> Cf. General Rules.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Reglaments XXVII.

<sup>37</sup> Report on the Life of the Congregation, Hna. Inés Mercedes Mejía, 1989-1994. Pg. 80.

*of analphabetism... therefore, we must enter with discernment in the world of technology and communication”.*<sup>38</sup>

Later on, in 2002, reflecting on our mission in a globalized world, the 14th EGC of Bangalore, India, shared on *“the importance of the means of social communication, the need to form ourselves for the correct use of these and to benefit from them for an apostolic projection”.*<sup>39</sup>

Moving on with our search, in 2004, in Tours, France, at the 52<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter, the web page of the Congregation was presented and, in the 53<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter, we were asked to give special attention to *“formation and updating in the means of communication and in the new technologies, stirring up a critical attitude in the face of their adequate use at the service of the mission”.*<sup>40</sup>

At the EGC of Mexico in 2006, we saw that *“with the creation of the web page we were invited to greater communication among ourselves, in relation to the world, the mission and our own life in the Congregation. The insistence of Jesus on transmitting to others what is essential to enlighten their path, helps us to take seriously the mission of communication, not only on the screen but also in the heart of the dialogues...”.*<sup>41</sup>

In January, 2008, at the EGC of Bucaramanga, it was expressed that *“we recognize the value of the means of communication for the mission, however, we confirm that there are abuses which hurt the person and the community. Periodic evaluations will favor their good use. We will look for ways to form and to actualize ourselves, as well as to financing them in community. The 16<sup>th</sup> EGC, values the information work through the Congregation’s web page, as well as those of the Provinces, and thanks the sisters who render that service”.*<sup>42</sup>

The 17th EGC of Cartagena, speaking of formation and openness, says that *“the means of communication and the new technologies also demand a*

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<sup>38</sup> Twelve EGC, Cali. 1998. Pg. 19.

<sup>39</sup> Fourteenth EGC, Bangalore. 2002. Pg. 23.

<sup>40</sup> Fifty-third General Chapter, Tours. 2009. Pg. 43.

<sup>41</sup> XV EGC, Mexico. 2006. Pg. 12.

<sup>42</sup> The XVI EGC, “Year of the Earth”. Bucaramanga, December 2007- January, 2008. Pg. 7.

*formation according to circumstances*".<sup>43</sup> Besides, in the section on Mission, it insists that we need *"to leap into the world of communications to announce Jesus Christ. This is a new continent to evangelize, as Benedict XVI had said"*.<sup>44</sup>

Lately, at the 18<sup>th</sup> EGC of Cochabamba, continuing with the reflection and the search of recent years, we are invited to: *"Make a better and wider use of the means of social communication at the level of the Congregation"*.<sup>45</sup> It proposes to draw the best benefit possible from the MSC for evangelization at the interior of the Congregation... and suggests a team of three sisters who will work collegially to start the reflection to be presented as a proposal at the General Chapter. This project is a response to the request from the EGC.

It is because of the sincere attitude of search in the Congregation regarding new technologies, without forgetting, that in spite of the many opportunities which the Means offer, the message needs to make its way in among the numberless messages which the web carries along, many of them not only indifferent but contrary to the Gospel and its message of salvation. It is necessary, of course, to live with conviction one's own vocation and to reevaluate the means of communication in transmitting the Gospel as an act of love, through which God reveals Himself and the response of faith of humanity is expressed, generating a prolific dialogue.

The Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) projected to all contexts within the Congregation with a critical view, are a potential possibility to develop social action and to promote an education from the Gospel's outlook. The public, immersed in the cultural contexts of technological culture, may find in the virtual means of information, possibilities to create their own style of living their relationship with God in a committed way. Their experiences of God, as well as their faith may be shared from the different forms of information communication, making these virtual means new spaces, places to believe and to be.

Once the evangelizing impulse is assured, expressed in a concrete, a serene and balanced living out the personal consecration, a constant discernment to

<sup>43</sup> The XVII EGC, Cartagena. 2011. Pg. 15.

<sup>44</sup> Idem. Pg. 30.

<sup>45</sup> The XVIII EGC, Cochabamba, 2013.

know what ways and means to choose for evangelization is necessary. Many are the ways which rise up in this areopagus: web sites, blogs, images, videos animation, social webs... A spider web of options at times infinite, opens itself as a wide endless horizon. It will be necessary, therefore, to know how to discern based on human and evangelical criteria so as not to loose one's way and to even be trapped within this modern era of technology.

## 7. CONCLUSION

To integrate oneself in the Information Society is not a mere *aggiornamento*; it is to assume a new paradigm in understanding the human being, of announcing Jesus Christ and of living today the foundational charism. Recent Popes have had this quite clear. Benedict XVI affirmed:

*"I would like to stop and consider the development of the digital social webs which are contributing to the surge of a new "agora", a public and open market place in which persons share ideas, information, opinions and where, besides, new relations and forms of community are born.*

*These spaces, when they are well valued and balanced, favor forms of dialogue and of debate which, carried out with respect, safeguard of intimacy, responsibility and interest for truth , may reinforce the ties of unity among persons and promote efficaciously the harmony of the human family, The exchange of information may become true communication, contacts may transform themselves into friendship, connections may facilitate communion. If the social webs are called to actualize this great potencial, persons participating in them strive to be authentic, because in these spaces, not only ideas and information are shared, but these are the object of communication".<sup>46</sup>*

Let us remember, that the society in-formation and learning modify our comprehension of human identity, our way of being in ourselves and in the world, in space and time, our way of living mission.

Pope Francis on the theme for the World Day of Communications, 2014, insists on "*communication at the service of an authentic culture of encounter*"<sup>47</sup> and he points out that the human being expresses himself especially in his ability to communicate. In communication and through it, we can encounter other persons, we express ourselves to ourselves, our thought, what we believe in, how we would like to live and, most importantly, we learn to know the persons with whom we are called to live. Such communication requires honesty, reciprocal respect and effort to learn one from another; it demands the ability to respectfully dialogue with the truths of the others. In fact, often what at first

<sup>46</sup> Message of Benedict XVI for the 47th World Day of Social Communications, 2013.

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.pccs.va/index.php/es/giornate-mondiali-delle-comunicazioni-sociali-4/2014>.

seemed "diversity" reveals the richness of our humanity and in discovering the other we also find the truth of our being.

In our time a new culture is developing, which favored by technology and communication is in a sense "amplified" and "ongoing". So, we are also called *"to make discover through the means of social communication, besides the personal encounter, the beauty of all what constitutes the foundation of our path in life, the beauty of faith, the beauty of the encounter with Christ"*.<sup>48</sup>

The era of globalization strongly demands that communication may arrive to the most remote places in the real world, and also *"environments created by the new technologies, the social webs, so as to make its presence visible... listening, dialoguing, encouraging"*<sup>49</sup> such that no one may be excluded.

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<sup>48</sup> Message of Pope Francis to the participants at the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, September 21, 2013.

<sup>49</sup> Idem.

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**DOMINICAN SISTERS  
OF CHARITY OF THE PRESENTATION  
OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN  
GENERAL CHAPTER 2014 - LA GRANDE BRETÈCHE - TOURS - FRANCE**