

The Church and the Media

There is a story of a singer, very well-known in his own locality who was on holidays with his wife and family in another part of the country. It was raining one of the days, so the singer, his wife, and four children went to the pictures. When they arrived the lights were on and there were about ten people in the seats. When they entered, all ten jumped to their feet and applauded loudly. The singer was thrilled to be recognised so far from home. A man came over and shook his hand, and the singer said. 'I'm just amazed that you should recognise me so far away from home.' 'Recognise you?' said the man; 'I haven't a clue who you are.' 'All I know is that the manager of the cinema said he would not show the film unless six more people turned up!'

I sometimes feel that the Catholic Church is a bit like that in the area of communications. For instance, at the time of the late Pope's funeral we got more than our share of media coverage - the Polish pontiff being very much a media figure but this flurry of interest was mostly short-lived. But if we play our cards right the secular media can work in our favour.

They say that the new Archbishop elect of Westminster, who is to be installed this week, is very adept with the secular media. They won't have it all their own way with him. We need to compete with the secular press and be able to present the perennial Gospel truth in a more dynamic form adapted to the times in which we live. Here the media can be our friend. They say that when a priest prepares his homily he should have the bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.

However, overall it seems that the secular press are more apt to carry stories of a contentious nature about religion and overlook the positive contribution which the Church has and is making towards the betterment of humanity. This week when the Pope visited the Holy Land, some in the Press were more focussed on the 17 year old Joseph Ratzinger's involvement with the Hitler Youth some 60 years ago that his call for a radical overhaul of policies in the Holy Land which can lead to peace. He told them to tear down the walls and open up channels of communication for peace. This should have been the headlines rather than what happened over 60 years ago.

Modern culture, by and large, does not sit easy with organised religion but let's not undervalue ourselves as catholic Christians and hide the

light of our faith 'under a bushel'. It is of paramount importance that we communicate the catholic standpoint on doctrine and morals clearly and decisively whether orally or in print.

In today's Gospel Jesus prays: 'you are my friends if you do what I command you'. For today's rather sceptical audience we need to communicate, whether orally or in print, the full gospel message from a commanding standpoint. The Holy Father recently spoke about the dangers of relativism especially in the context of morality. Modern man feels ill at ease with an objective moral order - hence the appeal of relativism which 'waters down' the core beliefs of our Faith and compromises our message. Even some articles which appear now and again in the religious media are infected with relativism.

Yes, the church is in the business of world communications. Even though it may appear to be a dialogue with the deaf at times, let us use every means at our disposal to transmit the Gospel Truth to our contemporary culture with enthusiasm and effectiveness and not flinch from the task.

QUESTIONS

1 They say that 'paper never refused ink'. Do you think that people are too gullible when it comes to the secular press? To what extent do you think the Press and Media shape public opinion? Discuss

2 Do you think that the Church as an institution is scared to speak out on certain thorny subjects for fear of offending people even people who are church-goers. How should the Church deal with sensitive subjects such as abortion, contraception, homosexuality, euthanasia etc. so that its voice can appear more understanding of people's situations and less condemnatory? Discuss

3. Is the Church too focussed on 'safe' Justice and Peace issues in the developing world and less concerned about thorny justice issues 'in our own backyard' such as the rights of children to be brought up by a Mum and a Dad and not same-gender partners? Discuss

4. Why is the Pope so opposed to moral relativism which is a term used in Theology where there are no absolutes when it comes to 'right and 'wrong'? Discuss