Roberta Santoro

PROTECTION OF CHRISTIAN VALUES AND RELIGIOUS WEBSITES

1. THE DIGITAL WORLD IS THE RESULT OF EPOCHAL CHANGES, WHICH CANNOT BE SEPARATED FROM A SYSTEM OF VALUES

It should be considered first of all that civil society is experiencing a new phase of secularisation, in which emergence (of civil subjects, of the individual, of communities) takes on the value of priority, emphasising the character of a self-referentiality, solely aimed at realising one's own desire and centred on one's own interest: these desires tend to be felt as the individual's «rights». Zygmunt Bauman rightly describes our society as a society of «consumer tourists», in which the primacy of «experiencing», of pursuing one's desire in a narcissistic manner, prevails [cf. Bauman 1998]. Today, we are all considered as consumers, with some rights and many duties that are possible in the "cathedrals" in which "worship" is practised at every level by the faithful, who agree to submit to a selection that also includes outcasts and marginalised people to whom access is impossible (and sometimes forbidden).

Rarefied social relations, evanescent bonds, an increasingly "liquid" society are words that are repeated over and over again in contemporary analyses of various social contexts [cf. Bauman 2000]. However, these readings can also accentuate the phenomenon of so-called "liquidity", lead-

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ing one to fail to appreciate the value (albeit dimensioned) of a persistent part of the "social", that is, the presence of a base, a starting point composed of ties, i.e. the relationships that give consistency to living in a society and thus allow for the concretisation of specific relationships and activities of a sociality that is fundamental to the implementation of a coexistence that goes beyond mere individualism. Our time is characterised by an individualistic closure, but it is also made up of a thousand voluntary and third sector associations, of new ways of sharing parts of life, of exchanges between families and between generations that express, in a form corresponding to contemporaneity, the continuation of community ties [cf. Boccacin 2017].

In this framework, religion retains all its value as a foundation of relationships (for good, but also for bad sometimes), since it itself constitutes a reference for individual and social existence. Socio-semiotic language helps to better understand the reason why religion places the needs of man, of an increasingly complex and multifaceted man, at the centre of social life. In this role of religion, one identifies an initial existential conflict with social objectives based on consumerism, indifferent individualism, profit, and the emphasis on power, which put pressure on the state from which they demand the recognition of alleged "rights" many times appearing disconnected from duties.

These new scenarios of complexity characterise the way we communicate and are reflected in the use of digital communication tools. Digital information technology has already reshaped man's personal and relational experience. It changes the perception of "inside/outside", "near/far", which is cultivated by the representation of an eternal "present" constructed by the networks of network communication, which affects the spatiotemporal coordinates that form its warp.

2. THE DIGITAL WORLD AS THE SITE OF A NEW RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Clearly, it is not the value of digital tools and their potential that is being questioned (they are means, goods useful for the progress of man and his relations), but how man uses them and what values he is inspired by in making use of them. In this perspective, the function of religion and the

intervention of a Christian vision becomes central, which in this hyper-technological context identifies the indispensable elements of a new humanism, which we could call "digital humanism". The centrality of the human person (and of his relationships), the ability to orient the use of technologies to relational needs inspired by Christian values can be perceived as foundations for a new humanism in the digital era. This humanism, in fact, must promote the development of the integrity of the person and brotherhood among human beings even in the new Internet context, transforming digital networks into networks of charity (in the broadest and most theological sense of the term).

However, there are many questions: how to preserve and deepen Christian identity without falling into attitudes of preconceived closure and rejection, intolerance, and rejection? How to live this willingness to meet, this possibility of dialogue, without falling into the temptation according to which «one religion is worth the other», thus also abdicating one's own history and tradition? The problem does not only concern the identity of the Christian faith, but also the cultural, I would say intercultural, identity of a people, which finds in religion one of its characterising factors: in both these spheres we witness the flourishing of attitudes inspired by fear, by the defence of an identity defined once and for all, as if every personal and cultural identity cannot come about through encounter and confrontation with others!

Ecclesial places (think of parishes, pastoral communities) are spaces dedicated to the construction of social relations, and precisely because of this function they are called upon to deal with the ambivalences, the fragmentations typical of our contemporary society, among these of course are also those caused by a distorted use of digital tools. One wonders what processes enable us to establish and maintain solid and sometimes innovative social relations? Today, relational innovation relates to the presence of digital media in the everyday life of individuals, to larger spheres such as that of families, generations, social organisations and institutions. The consequences on the Italian ecclesial reality are important: in fact, the proclamation of the Gospel, based mainly on direct encounter and a personal proposal, today finds itself having to come face to face with the "virtuality" of digital media, and at the same time with their bursting scope in expanding the opportunities for encounter and pastoral proposal within today's world. This new dimension has fostered reflection on the

meaning of the Church's mission in the current reality of digital communi-
cation (initiated at the General Assembly of Bishops in May 2018) and on
the impact of digital tools, understood as openness to the other, on a new
model of citizenship. It is precisely the recovery of social relations and
human values in the exercise of an ideal of citizenship that pushes to-
wards the intercultural character of citizenship, a kind of continuous chal-
lenge that opens up against the communicative potential of the internet
and the web in general. Already Benedict XVI in his message for the XLV
World Communications Day (5 June 2011) emphasised that this is ad-
dressed to young people "who are experiencing this change in communica-
tion, with all the anxieties, contradictions and creativity proper to those
who open themselves with enthusiasm and curiosity to the new experienc-
es of life goes on but I go further... The new technologies allow people to
meet each other beyond the boundaries of space and of the same cultures,
thus inaugurating a whole new world of potential friendships". The Encyc-
lical *Caritas in Veritate* also suggests that "the media can become factors
of humanisation not only when, thanks to technological development, they
offer greater possibilities for communication and information, but above
all when they are organised and oriented in the light of an image of the
person and the common good that respects their universal values" (no. 73).
This requires that "they be centred on the promotion of the dignity of per-
sons and peoples, that they be expressly animated by charity, and that
they be placed at the service of truth, goodness and natural and supernat-
ural fraternity." The doctrinal framework, which forms the basis of Chris-
tian values, defines that "The new media are powerful instruments of edu-
cation and cultural enrichment, of commerce and political participation, of
intercultural dialogue and understanding, and, ... they also serve the
cause of religion. However, there is another side of the coin: the media,
which can be used for the good of people and communities can also be used
to exploit, manipulate, dominate and corrupt."[1]

The complexity of digital tools is characterised by their dual dimension,
as positive and negative dimensions coexist and combine in ever different
ways, affecting human existence in a significant way and posing new
questions to religion.

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[1] Pontificio Consiglio delle Comunicazioni Sociali, *Etica in Internet* (22.02.2002),
https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc
_20020228_ethics-internet_it.html [last access: 20.09.2023].

The religious dimension proposes to mankind ethical principles that find their foundation either in revelation or in nature or conscience, in any case in instances of a higher level than those of any government, however democratically elected. Moreover, the fundamental values they embody have always represented inalienable reference points for people's lives. Religion is not only an expression of power representing religious principles, but essentially represents the place where the human person redesigns his or her identity. In this perspective, religion increasingly takes on a public connotation and becomes a social subject that must write the rules of coexistence with civil society. The need to write the rules of coexistence is also reflected in the digital world, where a greater prominence of religions is proposed as a need to preserve the degree of civilisation and progress of a people.

All of this has depended on the need to build a system of values that leads to peaceful coexistence within which each society can bring about the well-being of each individual man, considered as an integral part of society itself. The religious factor fills with content the personal aspirations to freedom, equality, tolerance, participation, or, in other words, fills with content the dignity of the person in "everyday social reproduction". This is the only way to understand the importance of the religious phenomenon in socio-political and cultural manifestations, in reference to the most diverse issues, with particular regard to relations (between states and communities, citizens and institutions) and to the places and means by which personality is formed. The place given to religion within today's society is justified precisely in the effort to restore relevance to the centrality of the person. This is why the public space, occupied by the "Net", is also being redesigned: the structures of public opinion, the production of social consensus, "civil society", not to mention the economy, are affected by the continuous structuring and deconstruction induced by the continuous flow of information in an acentric network, within which aggregations and contractions are formed and dissolved in continuity. The space of experience emerges in "cyberspace": virtual reality in the sense of technologically mediated reality, a space deployed by electronics. A culture-dominated *ethos* is asserted: the autonomy of culture is claimed over the natural basis of existence, culture refers back to culture. Virtual space, interwoven by the electronic network, and physical space, which man accesses through his senses, blur and distance themselves in continuity,

complicating man's experience. The fact raises enthusiasm but also raises reservations about the fate of the human.

3. THE SEARCH FOR NEW RULES OF COEXISTENCE IN THE USE OF DIGITAL TOOLS

There is no doubt that the use of digital tools is guided by human values, which are the expression of a vision of life. Consequently, it is a question of investigating what values are to be dealt with, considering that this vision of life is translated into a system of legal rules necessary to regulate its use by individuals and the various public and private entities. However, it should be noted that the relativism that characterises our society does not make it easy to identify the human values and Christian values to which to refer. One should ask oneself what Christian values should guide people in their use of digital tools.

Throughout history, human relations have been profoundly characterised by a complex of cultural, moral, ethical and also religious and spiritual principles. A set of elements so combined that they constitute Christian values (cf. Mancuso 2013].

The Internet offers an image of religion, which is presented within it using the same language as the digital world. This constitutes a novelty, but at the same time a limitation for the representation of the values of Christianity. We can therefore say that there is a Christian religion "on the Net", which is different from understanding the Net as a religion. This is not without significant consequences: very often, in today's society, the message coincides with the need to want and need to communicate; it follows that the nature of the religious message risks being transformed and, sometimes, deformed.

The Catholic Church itself, by definition a «universal» institution that founds a global identity, continuously confronted with different religions and cultures, had to "update". John Paul II himself XXVI World Youth Day invited young people to proclaim the Gospel and build brotherhood, using Facebook. It was precisely with John Paul II that we witnessed a necessary valorisation of crossing numerous cultural thresholds to carry out his mission, one of which is the communication and information revolution (36th World Communications Day 2002).

Along these same lines, Benedict XVI has repeatedly emphasised how the use of modern means of communication in priestly ministry is increasingly important. "With their spread, the responsibility of proclamation not only increases, but becomes more pressing and demands a more motivated and effective commitment. In this regard, the priest finds himself as if at the beginning of a new story, because the more modern technologies create ever more intense relationships and the digital world expands its boundaries, the more he will be called upon to deal with them pastorally, multiplying his commitment, in order to place the media at the service of the Word" (Address on the occasion of the 44th Communication Day). Certainly, the Pope admits "the risk of a use dictated mainly by the mere need to make oneself present, and of mistakenly considering the web as a space to be occupied", and emphasises that "presbyters are instead required to have the ability to be present in the digital world in constant fidelity to the Gospel message", making use, "alongside traditional tools, of the contribution of that new generation of audio-visuals (photos, videos, animations, blogs, websites), which represent unprecedented opportunities for dialogue and useful means also for evangelisation and catechesis." In fact, the Catholic Church itself realises that the task of those who, as consecrated persons, work in the media is above all to pave the way for new encounters, ensuring the quality of human contact and attention to people and their spiritual needs, in a certain sense, offering the people of the digital age the signs to recognise the Lord.

Today, this way of sustaining religious and personal identity is inevitably faced with new challenges represented by networked religions, the proliferation of forms of communication that are not easily assimilated, and the loss of cultural memory.

The subject of communication is important for the life of the Church because it is coessential to its dimension and is closely functional to its mission, namely that of proclaiming and spreading the Gospel. The Magisterium, moreover, both pontifical and episcopal, has in several ways rediscovered the value of communication precisely by placing it in relation to the *missio*, as the CEI itself has indicated through the 2004 Directory on Social Communications in the Mission of the Church, "Communication and Mission".

The limitations caused by the health emergency made it necessary to increase the use of mass media tools, a constant recourse to the web to

stream Masses, liturgies, and other spiritual proposals (even Easter was experienced from home thanks to the Internet). The Gospel, the religious message has passed through these modern technologies, giving rise to serious reflection on the quality of the "digital pastoral" and on the liturgy-community relationship (already the Second Vatican Council, with the decree *Inter mirifica* in an explicit manner dealt with communication and its instruments, aware that they "if well used, offer great advantages to the human race, because they effectively contribute to uplifting and enriching the spirit, as well as to spreading and consolidating the kingdom of God." But he also warned that they can also be used against God's plan, turning them to the ruin of man "because of the damage that their misuse has very often caused to humanity").

Questioning the aesthetic sense of religion is not a new conceptual operation, but it resurfaces strongly in the days of the coronavirus emergency, because of the explosion of "online religion", of the value of communication tools with masses, prayer times, video-catecheses, Lent, messages from bishops, parish priests and lay people via the web.

Forced confinement has created a gigantic jolt to humanity. It not only destabilises certainties acquired over generations, but inevitably reprograms the formats of existence such as space and time. If the former is reduced for most people to the domestic sphere, the latter is reprogrammed by cancelling the traditional social times to which we were accustomed. Isolations and quarantines have therefore forced the individual to live in a "unique suspended time, to reprogramme his agenda by rethinking usual practices such as, for example, ecclesiastical ones"[2] [Padula 2020].

This transposition takes place through social networks (Facebook, Instagram), instant messages (WhatsApp, Telegram) or by using one of the many videoconferencing platforms available. In addition to these pastoral experiences, structured and lived online, there is also the sharing, again via the web, of impromptu celebrations on the terraces of rectories or prayers recited in a car by the willing priest who drives around the city streets with a megaphone.

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[2] Translation made by the author from the original in Italian.

The varied landscape, characterised by religious pluralism, with regard to the use of the Internet favours the establishment of a principle of equality. Indeed, it can be said that the offer of a space on the Net, insofar as it obliges the observance of predetermined and general rules, creates a condition of equality even between subjects of different natures. It happens, therefore, that religions, new or of established tradition, are equated on the net with sects or esoteric cults, more or less legitimate. The net is a free place where each subject presents its own programme, can celebrate rites, sell sacred articles, or organise pilgrimages and religious tourism, also equipping itself with mechanisms that not only disseminate information, but also create interest.

The purpose of this new religious "field" is twofold: on the one hand, the various organisations can communicate, in real time, with each other, with their faithful, with a wider public. At the same time, the various religious sites disseminate content and images through which they transfer their messages.

These are complex phenomena, reflecting constantly evolving processes. Moreover, these cyber spaces of religion often also disseminate syncretistic messages of a "new" type of religiosity, which have the essential characteristic of questioning so-called traditional religions.

4. THE LEGAL DIMENSION OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

The digital world constitutes a kind of scenario in which religious denominations present themselves in order to reach out in the most direct way to the faithful, those already adherents and potential adherents. At the same time, the way in which religious denominations self-represent themselves and make use of the web constitutes a challenge, which has advantages and disadvantages.

Accessing, for example, the website of the Italian Catholic Church (www.chiesacattolica.it, recently modified and updated), it presents itself at first glance with an essential graphic appearance and a rather easy and agile usability, thus allowing the visitor a simplified navigation also based on intuitive common sense.

The site is divided into various sections such as, for example, the content section, i.e., news on all the activities of the Italian Episcopal Confer-

ence (CEI) and the various in-depth studies on topics related to Catholic doctrine. In addition, there are various links such as the on-line edition of the daily newspaper Avvenire, the possibility of streaming live news broadcasts from the TV 2000 television network, the opportunity to connect to television programmes broadcast by RAI, and lastly, a link to Vatican Radio.

There is no area for real-time interaction such as forums or chat forums, leaving this task to the newsletters.

There is a gallery of videos, photos and images of all the CEI's activities on the site; it is also possible to consult the pages in the so-called "accessible version".

The spirit of openness to new media can be seen in the possibility of being able to share news on one's Facebook profile.

It is precisely on the social network Facebook that there is an official page dedicated to the Catholic Church, defined as "Instruction", which stems from an invitation addressed by Pope Benedict XVI to all Catholics to "seek ways to spread new voices and images of hope through the telematic network that envelops our planet with increasingly dense meshes, so that the Church continues to be present with its message in the great areopagus[3] of social communication and does not find itself alienated from the spaces in which countless young people navigate in search of answers and meaning for their lives." In addition, Benedict XVI reiterates that "It is necessary that even on Facebook the Catholic, even the young, be immediately recognised for a different style compared to a certain vulgarity and superficiality that is fashionable today. In the new contexts and with the new forms of expression, the Christian is once again called upon to offer an answer to anyone who asks the reason for the hope that is in him." The page was therefore born, "albeit with all its limitations, from this precise need: to offer a vision of the world, of man, of life, of culture, of faith according to the Catholic perspective and to analyse political, economic and social phenomena according to the Church's social doctrine. This space intends to present itself to the world of the Web as a point of reference for observant Catholics, a source of clarification and in-depth study for those Catholics who are not well informed about Catholicism,

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[3] Translation made by the author from the original in Italian.

and finally a place of debate, information and confrontation for all those who are not Catholics."[4]

It should be noted that this type of attention, inherent to the relationship between religions and the Internet (especially the Catholic Church), testifies to the desire to guarantee help aimed at protecting young people, their families and Internet operators so that they can become the main protagonists of communication and intelligent use of the Internet. What is certain is that one cannot ignore the critical nature of computer networks and the innumerable aspects related to them under numerous profiles (ranging from the legal to the pedagogical, criminological, social and educational fields), which are at the root of growing social unease, accompanied by concern on the part of national, religious and community institutions. The growing participation in the use of the Internet, noticeable in young people and highlighted by the number of hours spent in front of the computer to acquire, not always, information and culture, reveals the negative aspect of reality. The rapid transmission of facts, images, news, especially when they are not controlled, can have both positive and negative consequences on a person's psychological, moral and social development. The use of the Internet, without any doubt, represents a new basis for communication, as well as a formidable tool for democracy and cultural growth. The network provides easy access to educational resources, enabling new collaborative forms of learning, offering opportunities for dialogue with experts on a variety of topics, and fostering contact with the pluralism of cultures.

Young people, in this outlined framework, represent the natural market segment of all these processes: they constitute the part of society most sensitive to the technological world and, at the same time, they are the subjects to be defined as easily "attacked". The Internet is an interactive type of communication, which, compared to traditional media, has as its characteristic the direct involvement of users in the creation and use of contents and services. In this flow of information, illicit content may be hidden, or virtually harmful to young people themselves, since not only the psychological and educational component may be jeopardised, but also religious and spiritual formation, which is the basis of personal morals

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[4] Pope Benedict XVI on his Facebook page dedicated to the Catholic Church, defined as "Instruction".

and a guide in the search for the meaning of life (On the Internet, every-one has the possibility of entering news and information, as well as draw-ing on them, and this poses a major problem for institutions such as the Catholic Church, which need to "defend" the certainty of the doctrine taught and the faith professed. For example, the document The Church and the Internet poses the problem of the proliferation of religious sites that bear a "Catholic" label, but which, being unofficial, present "eccentric doctrinal interpretations, extravagant devotional practices and ideological proclamations."[5]

In particular, from the research under review, one can read the exist-ence of the ethical principle, which underlies Catholic doctrine, of the cen-trality of the human person and his dignity, also in the field of communi-cation, which turn out to be the aim and measure of the use of the means of social communication and the most technologically advanced media such as the Internet.[6]

The recognition of a personal dignity of the young person, founded on assumptions of an ethical nature for civil society and of a theological na-ture for the Church, attributes not only a patrimony of values, of duties, of aspirations, but also the recognition of a non-passive subjectivity[7] "in which it is affirmed, with regard to the identity of the person that it is on this quality, on the person, on our identity and on our commitment as Christians immersed in the media that we must leverage. [...] the Church that goes online cannot be a fictitious Church, but must be what it is, that is, a Church ready to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus throughout the world. A vision, this, that goes beyond those theses that, even on the Internet, sustain a distinction between the institutional Church and the grassroots Church."

At the same time, the question arises as to the conditions of its practi-cability by the Christian proclamation, always in dynamic balance be-tween the demands of faith cultivation and its destination to the "crowd". On the one hand, Christian discourse cannot but clothe itself with the dis-cretion required by the intimacy of the personal relationship it intends to

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[5] Pontificio Consiglio Delle Comunicazioni Sociali, *La Chiesa e Internet* (22.02. 2002), no. 8.

[6] Idem, *Etica in Internet*, no. 3.

[7] Cf. A.V.V., *Chiesa in rete 2.0*, Atti del Convegno nazionale – Roma, 19-20 January 2009 – San Paolo, 2010, pp. 209 ff.

establish between the subject and the Gospel of Jesus. On the other hand, it makes contact with the processes of public communication, activating itself in the public conversation in the way of promoting consensus. Confidentiality and publicity of Christian discourse question the believing conscience as to their possible conjugation in the context of networked communication.

All these structural changes highlight another aspect concerning the need to understand and know the various aspects of communication, the places and rules, the rights and duties that draw a profile, which could be either of service or of power. In fact, the problem of rules and the legal dimension of communication takes on an autonomous relevance, making communication important from a legal point of view in an increasingly multicultural society.

Communication, even in the Church, must be studied not only from a sociological, psychological and pastoral point of view, but also and above all from a legal point of view, both considering communication as a right of access to theological, sacramental and pastoral contents in the life of the Church and considering how much attention the Italian Church community (in all its components, i.e. bishops, clergy, men and women religious, lay people) pays to the protection of the human person and his rights.

For Christianity (both in terms of its organised dimension and in terms of the religious values it expresses in its mission to evangelise), frequenting cyberspace is a necessity insofar as it constitutes the direct and immediate way to communicate with people. It is interesting to note how the computer tool is not a product of the way of proclaiming the gospel (i.e., intrinsic values), that is, it is not an instrument produced by the vitality of the ecclesial community, as was direct communication and personal proclamation at the beginning of the ecclesial experience following the resurrection of Christ. Compared to the experience of Christianity (and religions, in general), the digital world has been produced externally, according to its own dynamics and interests, indifferent to the Christian fact. The believer's initiative, therefore, objectively takes on the profile of reaction. Since Christian living is a total participant in the human condition, by the mere fact of existing and posing itself as a phenomenon of the human, the space constituted on the coordinates of cybernetics commits the believing conscience to confront and account for its potentiality for the life of man: in its load of promise and/or under the sign of temptation.

Hence also the need for the Church to engage in defining the rules of reference in the use of cyber tools together with all other social subjects and institutions.

The pandemic phenomenon, with which we have been forced to deal, demonstrates its complexity by the mere fact that it affects different spheres that touch both directly and indirectly the field of economic, political, institutional, and religious relations.

The health emergency has imposed restrictions that have produced new rules, creating hardship also for all religious denominations, which have found themselves having to re-examine their social and public role. The relationship between Covid-19 and religious freedom, and the consequent role of the Church and religious freedom in times of emergency, is highly topical and of great interest.

The immediate effect of all this is the need to analyse the rules of coexistence within societies, where the coronavirus phenomenon still poses existential and even religious questions. One of these relates to the concept of the rule of law and the protection of religious freedom, embedded in both national and European contexts, with reference to globalisation in a climate of restriction of personal freedoms, social groups, and religious formations.

As in the pandemics of the past, places used by religions, especially for sacred rites, because of their intrinsic collective dimension, can favour contagion and for this reason they have been closed, like any other place where people could gather. As proof of this, the measures taken to deal with Covid-19 caused a series of restrictions on constitutional rights of freedom and, therefore, the right to religious freedom was also affected. The limitations imposed are of an indirect nature, a necessary consequence of measures to restrict freedom of movement and meetings. This was the first time, since the Italian Constitution came into force, that the need to protect the legal asset "health" led to such a wide-ranging limitation also of the rights of freedom so central to the structure of our fundamental Charter.

The absoluteness of the protection reserved for health has considerably compressed the protection reserved for religious sentiment. One example: the lapidary letter of the Prime Minister's Decree of 8 March 2020 (extended to the entire national territory the following day) that suspended all "events in public or private places", "including those of a recreational,

sporting, religious or fair character", "even if held in closed places but open to the public" (Article 1, letter g) and conditioned the opening (*rectius*, the entrance, as Article 1, letter h of Decree-Law no. 19 of 25 March) of places of worship "subject to the adoption of organisational measures such as to avoid gatherings, taking into account the size and characteristics of the places, and such as to ensure that attendees are able to observe a distance of at least one metre from each other", reaffirming, however, once again, the suspension of "civil and religious ceremonies, including funeral ceremonies" (Article 1, letter i).

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The limitations caused by the health emergency made it necessary to increase the use of mass media tools, a constant recourse to the web to stream Masses, liturgies, and other spiritual proposals (even Easter was experienced from home thanks to the Internet). The Gospel, the religious message has passed through these modern technologies, posing a serious reflection on the quality of the "digital pastoral" and on the liturgy-community relationship (Already the Second Vatican Council, with the decree *Inter mirifica* in an explicit manner dealt with communication and its instruments, aware that they "if well used, offer great advantages to the human race, because they effectively contribute to uplifting and enriching the spirit, as well as to spreading and consolidating the kingdom of God." But he also warned that they can also be used against God's plan, turning them to the ruin of man "because of the damage that their misuse has very often caused to humanity").

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This transposition takes place through social networks (Facebook, In-stagram), instant messages (WhatsApp, Telegram) or by using one of the many videoconferencing platforms available. In addition to these pastoral experiences, structured and lived online, there is also the sharing, again via the web, of impromptu celebrations on the terraces of rectories or prayers recited in a car by the willing priest who drives around the city streets with a megaphone. Beyond the reasons that motivate such choices (the main one is certainly the need to be spiritually present), one of the questions that deserves further study concerns the value of rites (and es-pecially the main one, that is, the Eucharistic liturgy) broadcast through digital tools (internet, streaming, social, ...). Online media have given the possibility to a large number of individuals to more intensely experience their "religious sentiments", in which the minister of worship is configured as *Alter Christus*, as one "called by God" to spread his Word. And he does so – wrote John Paul II – by combining "the permanent truth of the priest-ly ministry with the demands and characteristics of today."[9]

In spite of certain hesitations that revealed the difficulty in taking the right measure of the new restrictions (e.g. the "closeness" to the country expressed "in the opening of churches" in the CEI communiqué of 10th March was transformed two days later into a choice of "responsibility" in "closing churches"), the religious confessions adapted to the state provi-sions, bringing them under a safeguard clause of necessity and urgency also known to the religious rights.

It was precisely the National Office for Social Communications of the Italian Bishops' Conference that recently released the document "Cele-

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[8] Translation made by the author from the original in Italian.

[9] Ioannes Paulus PP. II, Adhortatio apostolica postsynodalis de Sacerdotum for-matione in aetatis nostrae rerum condicione *Pastores dabo vobis* (25.03.1992), AAS 84 (1992), pp. 657-804.

brating Mass on TV or in streaming,"[10] a *vademecum* aimed at all those priests, religious men and women, and deacons who are trying their hand at online celebrations. The suggestions of the Italian Bishops' Conference note are a fundamental handbook to technically manage this "spiritual tsunami" that has swept through the social accounts of so many faithful orphaned of the celebrations in the presence of the assembly of the faithful. The three parts of which it is composed ("practical indications", "directing attentions", "social glossary") have a double merit: that of indicating precise working methodologies and that of stimulating training in this area, hoping that it will be used as an incentive to know and interpret the identity codes of digital culture.

A religious dimension on the Web, in addition to paying appropriate attention to technical-formal details, must be projected in the perspective of a pastoral care "in" technological (mediated) communication, which puts the beauty of the given of faith at the centre and succeeds in incarnating it in the contemporary context, characterised precisely by the presence and development of digital media, by the factors of convergence and interactivity. The social impact of the religious and cultural moments promoted in the digital world (Morning Mass, promoted Rosaries, reading and explanation of sacred texts, spiritual and social commentaries, forms of listening ...) is of great inner impact (some moments have taken on a profound emblematic significance, such as the extraordinary prayer of Pope Francis on Good Friday 27th March 2021 in front of an empty St. Peter's Square, followed by an audience of 17 million 400 thousand viewers, equal to 64.6% of the entire television audience), with a large TV share. "These numbers indicate that in what we can define as the most active and convinced Catholics, there is a great movement in the search for spiritual sources. A very interesting flow towards the use of new technologies to compensate for the difficulty of participating in live liturgical celebrations, to have moments of religious expression even in the pandemic. And the Church at grassroots level has gone to great lengths to ensure alternative forms of participation. Much of it obviously follows the Pope, who has chosen to have the entire country attend morning Mass. A continuous but discreet presence that strikes in particular the closest believers who can follow him

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[10] Translation made by the author from the original in Italian.

every day"[11] [Garelli 2020, 264] (the interest, however, does not only concern the faithful, because the lay world also shows attention, sees a Pope who shows himself in the eyes of the people as a figure immersed in human affairs, who proposes the religious message with a simple style, of closeness, of sharing suffering and anguish. This presence of the Pontiff could be described as unusual in its ordinariness, humble, not *ex cathedra*, speaking at arm's length, touching on the substance of religious discourse, but also on concrete things. It means that in difficult times, like the one we are experiencing, one is always looking for sources, for resources, for meaning).

The experience of this time is making the idea grow in the awareness of many that there can be a search for spirituality or points of reference beyond the ordinary boundaries, because through the Internet one can connect with the parishes one wants, with the communities one identifies with more, that can organise better, that can offer meditations, reflections, more significant places. This goes in the direction of affirming a "community", a "parish", of choice over a predefined community. It gives people the chance to select, to see, to connect with realities considered more significant that know how to better interpret the present time, that facilitate discernment.

The need for more "normal" relationships, however, does not disappear. The virtual remains important, especially in reference to the young, indeed it does not erase the need for human relationships even in the realm of the spirit. There is always the nostalgia for a community, for a real, non-formal ritual in which one participates and which punctuates one's life. There remains the need for a place, a reference point, a space, an environment made up of faces, a people to which one belongs, even physically represented.

There is talk of a return to the essential, according to a survey carried out by the Ipsos Institute, using a sample of 1,000 interviews – aged between 18 and 75 – in the period between 24-26th March 2020) there prevails, in the Italian population, a greater religiosity, greater signs of faith that manifest themselves in a closeness to God. There are few who take the cue from the pandemic to detach themselves even more, even if the growth in need, in religious and spiritual demand remains circumscribed,

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[11] Translation made by the author from the original in Italian.

involving far more practising believers or committed Catholics than the totality of believers.

There are those who feel more spirituality, reflecting, praying, asking themselves questions, and there are those who, on the other hand, in a secular way, even though they declare themselves believers, that is, even though a religious feeling remains within them, do not necessarily interpret these events in the light of a lens, of a faith perspective.

This is clearly emerging, it is growing, even in the understanding of Christianity where there is a different language, a different alphabet, a different reading of reality.

Hence the realisation that our society has changed thanks also to the development of communication, of a new way of communicating, but communication itself has undergone historic changes, which have entirely modified its foundations, its structure. It is precisely these changes that pose another problem, not of secondary importance, concerning the appropriate need to be able to know and understand the various aspects of the "new" communication, i.e., the rules, rights and duties that derive from it. It is precisely addressing the issue of rules and above all the legal dimension of communication that is more necessary than ever because it aims to enhance the legal aspect of communication in an increasingly multicultural society. The importance of communication, even in the Church, must be studied not only from a sociological, psychological, and pastoral point of view, but also and above all from a juridical point of view, examining communication as a right in the life of the Church (Pope Ratzinger was the first Pontiff to land on social media; Pope Francis the first to arrive on Instagram and to define the Internet "a gift from God", but Pope Wojtyla gave the green light to the Vatican website back in 1995).

From a legal point of view, communication is to be understood as a right in the life of the Church (in fact, the normative production that the canonical order has elaborated since the Second Vatican Council is numerous) without neglecting the right of participation and the right of the faithful in relation to the theological content and with the value of ecclesial communion. The use of digital tools, therefore, stands out not only as a right-duty of the ecclesial community as such, but also as a right of the individual faithful to communicate and access the truth through digital means. Benedict XVI called for the digital world to be humanised and

made alive and vital, as it must be understood as a "human place" of communication (Benedict XVI, *World Communications Day*, 2013).

The Internet is understood not only as a tool for evangelising, but it too needs evangelising. Along these lines, Pope Francis also emphasises how Christian proclamation is made up of real and not virtual encounters and, therefore, highlights the limits of the use of media tools (Address of 7th December 2013 to the participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity); just as it is reiterated that "the current context calls all of us to invest in relationships, to affirm also in and through the web the interpersonal character of our humanity. *A fortiori*, we Christians are called to manifest that communion that marks our identity as believers. Faith itself, in fact, is a relationship, an encounter, and under the impulse of God's love we can communicate, welcome, and understand the gift of the other and correspond to it" (Holy Father's Message for the LIII World Communications Day, 2019).

From this point of view, digital communication becomes a space of our being, of our experience that, even if virtually, can be defined as an "anthropological place", a place of confrontation, in which the dimensions of identity, of relationship, in the humanistic perspective outlined by Benedict XVI [Augè 2009] take on relevance.

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Protection of Christian Values and Religious Websites

Abstract

The civil society is experiencing a new phase of secularisation. The Author describes in the article the following issues: 1) the digital world is the result of epochal changes, which cannot be separated from a system of values; 2) the digital world as the site of a new relationship between Church and civil society; 3) the search for new rules of coexistence in the use of digital tools; 4) the legal dimension of digital communication.

Keywords: Christian values; digital world; Church; civil society; communication

Ochrona wartości chrześcijańskich oraz stron internetowych o tematyce religijnej

Abstrakt

Społeczeństwo obywatelskie przeżywa nową fazę sekularyzacji. Autorka opisuje w artykule następujące zagadnienia: 1) świat cyfrowy jako efekt epokowych zmian, których nie da się oddzielić od systemu wartości; 2) świat cyfrowy jako miejsce nowej relacji Kościoła ze społeczeństwem obywatelskim; 3) poszukiwanie nowych zasad współistnienia w wykorzystaniu narzędzi cyfrowych; 4) wymiar prawny komunikacji cyfrowej.

Słowa kluczowe: wartości chrześcijańskie; świat cyfrowy; Kościół; społeczeństwo obywatelskie; komunikacja

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