

ETERNAL PROFIT: THE PRACTICALITY  
OF CATHOLIC TEACHING  
ON SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS

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*For the last 70 years, Catholic teaching on social communications has sought—and largely failed—to win a broadly shared commitment to sound moral formation as the foundational principle guiding the use of the instruments of social communications. This article explores one important factor for this apparent failure: a misunderstanding of the “practicality” of Catholic teaching on social communications. The article’s thesis is that the question of the practicality of Catholic social doctrine concerning social communications turns on this question of what “practicality” means—and specifically whether the horizon of the practical includes an objective moral order grounded in an intelligible human telos. The article also explores different ways in which the word “practical” can be understood and uses these ways to evaluate the practicality of Catholic teaching on social communications. It concludes by making a suggestion as to how the practicality of Catholic teaching on social communications might be better understood. The central points of the article are then encapsulated in a “Thomistic” article complete with objections and replies.*

The primary motivation behind the development of Catholic doctrine on social communications has always been to offer pastoral guidance to media professionals and consumers of media.<sup>1</sup> Beginning with Pius XI’s 1936 encyclical “*Vigilante Cura*” (“With Vigilant Care”), the first Catholic magisterial document devoted specifically to the morality of social communications, church teaching has stressed “the very great importance” which the media of social communications have “acquired in our days and its vast influence alike in the promotion of good and in the insinuation of evil.”<sup>2</sup> Twenty-six years later, the Vatican II Council Fathers noted that media influence was growing exponentially and decided to draft a separate council document specifically addressing the topic of “The Media of Social Communications.”<sup>3</sup> In it the Council Fathers stressed the necessity of a moral approach to social communications.

If the media are to be correctly employed, it is essential that all who use them know the principles of the moral order and apply them faithfully in this domain.<sup>4</sup>

The abiding salience of the topic for the Magisterium is confirmed by the fact that, over the last 70 years, the Vatican has seen fit to issue nearly twenty pastoral documents dealing with some aspect of social communications.<sup>5</sup> Running through all these documents is the same leitmotif: the urgent need to apply the principles of the moral order to the domain of social communications. Yet despite steady attention to the topic and an ever more knowledgeable, nuanced, and sophisticated presentation, the Church's guidance has largely fallen on deaf ears. As Pope John Paul diplomatically put it in one of his final documents, his 2005 Apostolic Letter "The Rapid Development," "The world of mass media also has need of Christ's redemption."<sup>6</sup>

There are many causes for the failure of Catholic teaching on social communications to awaken—even among Catholics—a broadly shared commitment to sound moral formation as the foundational principle guiding the use of the instruments of social communications.<sup>7</sup> In this paper, I will explore one important factor for this apparent failure—a misunderstanding of the "practicality" of Catholic teaching on social communications. My thesis will be that the question of the practicality of Catholic social doctrine concerning social communications turns on this question of what "practicality" means—and specifically whether the horizon of the practical includes an objective moral order grounded in an intelligible human telos. If one assumes that technological and economic forces and structures defining the modern social communications environment are essentially amoral givens and therefore define the range appropriate moral responses for the communicator, then Catholic social doctrine with its assumption of the primacy of the spiritual over the material and its emphasis on individual moral responsibility will inevitably turn out to be "impractical." But if one questions the assumption that material conditions effectively determine and drive communications decision-making, one will find that Catholic social doctrine is supremely practical because it alone properly orients one toward objective human goods.

When one encounters the claim that Catholic doctrine on social communications is not practical, one immediately recognizes that the word "practical" can be taken in several different ways. The first set of ways has to do with the distinction between practical as opposed to theoretical.<sup>8</sup> The practical way of looking at things is ordered to action while the theoretical way is ordered to truth.<sup>9</sup> In other words, the theoretical way is concerned with the perfection of the activity of

thinking, while the practical way is concerned with the perfection of some activity other than thinking.<sup>10</sup> Take, for example, an advertising copywriter. Suppose that this copywriter has the job of making an ad campaign to convince male smokers that Marlboro is a man's cigarette. After many hours of fruitless brainstorming, our hapless copywriter suddenly hits on a creative concept showing ruggedly handsome cowboys smoking the product. In a feverish outpouring of pent-up genius, he sketches out an ad campaign based on "The Marlboro Man." Flushed with professional pride, he dashes to the office of his boss, visions of a bonus forming in his head. In this scenario, the copywriter's interest in cowboys is practical since it is for the sake of action—making effective cigarette ads that will boost Marlboro sales among male smokers. On the other hand, imagine a media effects researcher who also asks the same question of whether images of ruggedly handsome cowboys smoking Marlboros might affect the views male smokers have of whether Marlboros are masculine cigarettes. But her interest in images of cowboys smoking cigarettes is purely theoretical, since it is for the sake of understanding—of determining whether it is true that Marlboro Man images actually affect how people perceive Marlboro cigarettes—and not for the sake of convincing male smokers that Marlboro is anyone's kind of cigarette. Both are interested in the effect of the "Marlboro Man." But their interests differ in that one's interest is for the sake of action (selling cigarettes) and the other's is for the sake of truth (understanding whether it is true that images of this type significantly alter people's thinking).

Is Catholic teaching on social communications impractical in the sense of being merely theoretical—concerned only with understanding and not with action? It must first be recognized that practical action can often benefit from a fuller theoretical understanding of the matter on which action is sought. For example, the advertising copywriter may have been led to his particular plan of action after studying theoretical research on the demographics and psychographics of male smokers. In a similar way, Catholic teaching on social communications could make use of theoretical moral principles in order to formulate better practical advice about how to be a moral social communicator. Here it becomes clear that the distinction between the theoretical and the practical is not that of a dichotomy but more like a spectrum. At one extreme is the purely theoretical and at the other end is the purely practical. Thus one may locate a range of intermediate positions depending on the nature of the object considered, the mode of knowing the object, and the intent of the knower.<sup>11</sup>

The first distinction is between theoreticals (*speculabilia*) and operables (*operabilia*)—between objects that, on one hand, the human person can merely know about but not do or make and objects that, on the other hand, are proper subjects of human doing and making. An example of the former would be divine revelation because divine revelation is not a proper subject of human doing but only of human knowing. Man cannot divinely reveal but only know through faith that God has revealed. An example of the latter would be any act of human communication—news reporting or graphic design. The second distinction is between a mode of knowing that is theoretical and a mode of knowing that is practical. For example, visual transitions are an important part of how cinematographers communicate meaning about the relationship between one visual scene and the next. A “cut” is an abrupt visual transition where one scene is immediately replaced by another. A “dissolve” is a slow visual transition where one scene gradually replaces another. Now one can approach the topic of visual transitions using two different modes of knowing. On one hand, one can classify and divide the different kinds of video transitions and seek to understand what kind of meanings cinematographers and viewers associate with the different kinds of transitions. Here one is in the mode of seeking a scientific knowledge. On the other hand, one can study how one actually goes about making a cut or a dissolve. Here one is in the mode of the doer seeking practical knowledge. The third distinction concerns the intent of the knower—whether one intends actually to edit video using the different kinds of transition techniques available.

Putting these various distinctions together, one can further distinguish three different degrees of practical knowledge. The first might be called “remotely practical knowledge” where the object is something that is properly the subject of human making (for example, video cameras) but the mode of knowing and the intent remain theoretical, as when someone studies the physical principles that make digital video cameras possible but not the steps involved in constructing a camera, because there is no intention to make one. The second might be called “formally practical knowledge,” where the object and mode of knowing are practical, but the intent remains theoretical, as when someone considers not the physical principles but the actual steps for building a video camera but without actually intending to build one. Finally, the third might be called “completely practical knowledge” where the object, mode, and intent are all practical as when someone actually tries to build a video camera.

So to return to the question: Is Catholic teaching on social communications more theoretical than practical in that it concerns:

1. an object that is not properly the subject of human doing or making? Or
2. a mode of knowing an operable that is not concerned with operation? Or
3. an intent merely to foster insight into operation rather than an intent to foster operation?

Clearly, Catholic teaching makes frequent reference to God and to the divine ways of communicating.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, it might be argued, whenever it puts forward a theology of communication, the Church is reflecting on an object, namely God, that for man is theoretical rather than operable. Seen from one vantage point, this is certainly true. But if what the Church proposes about God is true, namely that man is created in the image and likeness of God in order to embrace divine revelation and to enter into loving dialogue with Him,<sup>13</sup> then the human person's greatest activity is to order every action in his life so that these intermediate actions lead to the final action of embracing his final destiny for Beatitude. It is in this way that the focus in Catholic teaching on social communications is not only on God and God's activity (a theoretical) but on man's response (an operable).

The Church sees these media as “gifts of God” which, in accordance with His providential design, unite men in brotherhood and so help them *to cooperate with His plan for their salvation*.<sup>14</sup>

Any thorough survey of Catholic teaching on social communications will find many passages that propose things to be known rather than done about the instruments of social communications. Is the mode of knowing proposed in the Church's teaching on social communications a mode not concerned with operation? Certainly the Church's teaching does not deal with the technical aspects of how to build and operate the instruments of social communications—an important point to which I will return shortly. But the Church's teaching does dwell at considerable length, in at least one document, on how to plan for the effective use of social communications.<sup>15</sup> Every document includes material that at least indirectly deals with operation. For example, *Vigilante Cura* talks about organizing Catholics to pressure producers into improving the moral content of movies. In two remarkable texts, Pope Pius XII attempted to sketch out the principles

for making what the Church would consider the ideal film.<sup>16</sup> Clearly then, Catholic social teaching is concerned not only with operables but also with modes of knowing these operables that are practical.

That leaves the third option: Is the intent of Catholic teaching on social communications merely to foster insight into operation rather than an intent to foster operation? As John Paul II has repeatedly stressed, it should be clearly understood that the Church's teaching is primarily oriented toward practical action:

It is urgent to rediscover and to set forth once more the authentic reality of the Christian faith, which is not simply a set of propositions to be accepted with intellectual assent. Rather, faith is a lived knowledge of Christ, a living remembrance of his commandments, and *a truth to be lived out*. A word, in any event, is not truly received until it passes into action, until it is put into practice. Faith is a decision involving one's whole existence. It is an encounter, a dialogue, a communion of love and of life between the believer and Jesus Christ, the Way and the Truth (cf. Jn 14:6). It entails an act of trusting abandonment to Christ, which enables us to live as he lived. (cf. Gal 2:20), in profound love of God and of our brothers and sisters.<sup>17</sup>

It becomes clear that, while one may choose to engage the Church's teaching regarding social communications at any point on the spectrum between the purely theoretical and the purely practical, the Church's intent is not merely to bring about an understanding of the truth of its claims. Rather, the Church wants everyone to act on this truth by seeking the wisdom to use the gifts of creation—especially the technologies of modern social communications—in a way that leads men to communicate in ways in harmony with their final end of loving dialogue with God. Hence, if the Church's teaching on social communications is misunderstood as impractical, the misunderstanding cannot be because the Church's intent is to present its teaching as something merely to be understood rather than put into practice.

If it now be granted that the Church's teaching on social communications intends to be practical, it remains to be shown why it is all too often understood as impractical. Here a second ambiguity in the word "practical" must be considered. The second diverse way in which the meaning of "practical" can be taken centers on two different ends of human action: the difference between making and doing. One end of human action—making—terminates in some object other than man and has as its purpose the perfection of the object made. The other end of

human action—doing—terminates in the human doer and has as its purpose the perfection of the one performing the action. This is equivalent to the distinction between craft or technique (*techne*) on the one hand and prudence or morality (*phronesis*)? on the other.<sup>18</sup> Technique has to do with right reason concerning how something is made, while prudence has to do with right reason concerning whether it should be made in the first place, and if made, how it should be used.<sup>19</sup> Technique sets aside the question of whether making the product perfects the maker and focuses instead on perfecting the external product. With morality, the focus is on perfecting the agent and what actions will help or hinder this goal.

Thus, it is in this distinction between doing and making that one begins to approach the primary reason why modernity finds Catholic teaching on social communications impractical. The tendency today is to see social communication entirely as a human artifact—a human making—controlled primarily by material factors. But Catholic teaching on social communications resolutely sees social communication as, first of all, a human activity manifesting man's nature as *Imago Dei* and finding its teleology in communication as the giving of the self in love.<sup>20</sup> Hence, the question of the practicality of Catholic teaching on social communications resolves itself into a question of which is more practical—making or doing? Catholic teaching on social communications has taken a clear stand on this issue.

In reflecting upon the means of social communication, we must face honestly the 'most essential' question raised by technological progress: whether, as a result of it, the human person 'is becoming truly better, that is, more responsible, more open to others, especially the neediest and the weakest, and readier to give and to aid all' (Pope John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 15).<sup>21</sup>

Given the obvious power and influence of media products, what could possibly justify the Church's conviction that a focus on the doing of communication is more practical than an emphasis on media products. Here it is helpful to reflect that actions of human making can always be looked at from two perspectives. The first consideration is the making itself—is it perfective of the object being made? Is the person doing the making going about it in the best way, such that the object being made will turn out well? The second consideration is the effect of the making on the maker—is it morally perfective of the person doing the making? For example, one can ask of people making a pornographic film: Are they going about the filming in a way that the end will achieve its desired effect? Is each scene staged in a way that the audience can clearly make out what is happening? Are the scenes arranged in such a

way as to awaken powerful lascivious affects in the minds of those watching? Will they want to pay to see more? Is the artistry of the film such that it might escape censorship? Looking at the technical aspect is one way of considering this or any human action. But one can also ask whether making such a film is morally perfective of the people involved? Will staging passionate love scenes make actors who otherwise have no loving commitment to each other and have no intention of being open to the generation or care of new human life make these actors more mature, loving, self-disciplined people? Will directing and producing a triple-x flick make the production people better not just at producing films but at pursuing the great final ends of human life—knowing, loving, and serving God in this life and enjoying Him forever in the next? Clearly then, every act of human making can be examined in a particular way that focuses on the particular end of making and in a comprehensive way that focuses on the ultimate end of the maker and asks whether the particular end can truly be ordered to the ultimate end of the maker.<sup>22</sup>

Hence social communication in its primary sense is focused on the perfection of the communicator—the unity and progress of human beings—and only secondarily on the perfection of the various means of communication manifested in artifacts such as films, books, and DVDs.<sup>23</sup> Thus the root of the misunderstanding of Catholic teaching on social communications as impractical manifests itself as disagreement about the proper relationship between material means and spiritual ends. Those who find Church teaching on social communications impractical do so because they give priority to the means (the perfection of the material artifacts of social communications) over the end of communication (the perfection of the senders and receivers). But, as has already been made clear, this is a foreshortened view, because the activity of forming and understanding messages is always personal and spiritual in the sense that it is an immanent immaterial cognitive activity.

Although the new media technologies make the moral question of their correct use all the more urgent, three characteristics of media technology work against moral reflection: 1. By allowing communication over greater distances and times, they push the means of communications to the foreground and even allow senders and receivers to become all but invisible to each other—although, of course, one cannot really communicate without intending to understand another human being, no matter how great the distances in space and time involved. 2. The speed at which modern social communications seemingly must take place further deemphasizes prudential judgment, since so much energy is devoted to the technical demands of producing

on tight deadlines. 3. The scale and complexity of the new communications technologies involve a learning curve that emphasizes technique over morality.

Still, it is not self-evident that the new “technical” circumstances that characterize social communications in themselves invalidate traditional moral principles. Therefore, the burden of proof remains with those who assert—or more commonly simply assume—that the new media technologies require new guiding principles, be they moral or technical. Yet, given the tendency of modern technology to shift the focus from morality to technique, one may legitimately ask whether the Church has made the most effective case possible for the unavoidable priority of moral choice and action in social communications, even in a highly technical world.<sup>24</sup> But even if the Church were to communicate its message with all the skill and sophistication of Madison Avenue, it is hard to imagine that professionals and users would suddenly give priority to the moral use of media.

Hence, a lack of proper disposition on the part of professional communicators and the media public remains the fundamental cause of why the Church’s teaching efforts have largely failed. When it comes to the creation and use of mass media, professionals and users are simply not interested in the issue of moral formation. And those who do take note of Church teaching tend to regard the church’s moral pronouncements as an inappropriate restriction on personal liberty or another manifestation of religion’s abiding reactionary impulse to bind artists to conventional ideas of morality.<sup>25</sup> But before the will can culpably abdicate its duty to moral responsibility, certain principles must first be present in the intellect. Hence, the failure of Catholic doctrine on social communications to achieve its intended effect has antecedent intellectual factors—for example, a lack of appreciation for the moral nature of social communications, a misordering of communicative means to properly human ends, or an ignorance of the importance and duty to form one’s conscience that follows from a deficient understanding of freedom.<sup>26</sup> If the Church wishes to win the war for the minds and hearts of media professionals and the consuming public, the question of the proper relationship between technology and freedom is the intellectual battleground on which it must wage a more effective fight.

**APPENDIX:**  
**A Thomistic Article on the Practicality of  
Catholic Teaching on Social Communications**

***Question: Is Catholic teaching on social communications practical?***

***Objection #1:*** Modern social communication is increasingly determined by material factors, revealing the primacy of the material over the spiritual (if indeed the spiritual is acknowledged to have any epistemic status at all). But Catholic teaching on social communications gives priority to the spiritual over the material in contradiction to the manifest experience of professional communicators. Therefore it is impractical.

***Objection #2:*** Furthermore, the economics of modern social communications (especially the huge expense involved in creating and operating new media systems and the need to satisfy the expectations of investors on whom the media companies depend for funding) requires ever more careful attention to profit and maximizing of audiences. But audiences are composed of people who are more or less virtuous so that mature appeals work only with some while base appeals work with many. But Catholic teaching on social communications demands favoring high appeals and foregoing base appeals. Therefore it is impractical.

***Objection #3:*** Furthermore, the complexity of modern communications technologies reveals that economic and social structures determine much of what people know and the values they hold—as Catholic teaching on social communications itself recognizes.<sup>27</sup> Catholic teaching on social communications presupposes that media professionals and consumers are free moral agents. But people who are not free to determine what they will think or what they will think about are not free moral agents. Therefore, Catholic teaching on social communications is impractical.

***Objection #4:*** Furthermore, a certain difference is found among ends; some are activities, others are products apart from the activities that produce them. Where there are ends apart from the actions, it is the nature of the products to be better than the activities, as the Philosopher says (NE Book 1 1094a3). But Catholic teaching on social communications gives priority to communicative actions over communicative products when priority should be given to what is better. Therefore it is impractical.

**Objection #5:** Furthermore, the essence of social communications is persuasion, for even informing and entertaining involve a kind of persuasion. But persuasion necessarily presupposes choice—not only the persuader’s freedom to select from the available means of persuasion but also the audience’s freedom either to yield to the persuasion or to remain unpersuaded.<sup>28</sup> Otherwise, communication would not be persuasion but coercion. But Catholic teaching on social communications constitutes a kind of law constraining the range of acceptable choices for the social communicator and hence is opposed to the freedom that social communication requires. Therefore Catholic teaching on social communications is impractical.

**On the contrary,** “God graciously arranged that the things He had once revealed for the salvation of all peoples should remain in their entirety, throughout the ages, and be transmitted to all generations.” (*Dei Verbum*, 7, CCC 74). This includes what God has revealed about moral truth in general and about the morality of human communication in particular.

**I answer that,** a thing may be practical in several ways: On one hand, something is practical (as opposed to theoretical) if it perfects some action other than thinking. In this way, Catholic teaching on social communications is clearly practical since it is directed not only to a true understanding of social communication, but also to the perfection of social communicative actions. On the other hand, something is practical (as opposed to productive) if the term of the action terminates in the producer rather than in the object produced. In this way, Catholic teaching on social communications is also clearly practical since its purpose is primarily to promote the moral perfection of the person communicating and only secondarily to promote the technical perfection of the artifact of communication produced as a means of communicating.

**Reply to Objection #1:** The technical means of modern social communications are increasingly determined by material factors, since modern social communications increasingly makes use of elaborate technologies to extend communicative acts beyond the natural range of man’s external senses. But it does not follow that man’s end changes simply because man, in making the age-old choice of the best means to his end, has a wider range of means from which to select.

**Reply to Objection #2:** The objection’s argument confuses means with ends. The terms of properly human communication always begin and

end in individual human beings. Since media technologies merely assist men in communicating beyond the natural range of the senses and over time, they are always means and never ends in themselves. Human communicative actions can always be looked at from two perspectives: in a particular way that focuses on the technical means and in a comprehensive way that focuses on the communicator and asks whether the means can truly be ordered to the communicator's final end. Hence, social communication in its primary sense is focused on the perfection of man and only secondarily on the perfection of the various means of communication manifested in artifacts such as films, books, and DVDs. The tendency today is to see social communication entirely as a human artifact—a human making—controlled primarily by material factors. But Catholic teaching on social communications rightly and resolutely sees social communication as primarily a human activity, manifesting man's nature as *Imago Dei*, and finding its teleology in the analogical relationship between human and divine communication as overflowing love.

**Reply to Objection #3:** People are never entirely passive with respect to the means of social communication (CCC #2493-99). If they were, media professionals would not need to continue making elaborate and expensive efforts to attract and hold audiences. Furthermore, ignorance differs from nescience, which is a simple lack of knowledge. Ignorance is a privation of knowledge where there is a natural desire to know. When, in addition to natural capacity, there is a moral duty to know, ignorance becomes morally culpable. (See Romans 1:22 and ST I-II.76.2) When used indiscriminately, the means of social communication can give rise to passivity among users. But that is why users should exercise vigilance and discipline, and above all form their consciences correctly, so that they do not forfeit their freedom. What the Church document cited says about media influence is meant to underscore the moral responsibility of media professionals, not to deny the freedom or moral responsibility of users.

**Reply to Objection #4:** The objection misreads Aristotle who is speaking only of cases of making. In cases of making, the product is better than the activity because the activity of making is done for the sake of the end, namely the product. But not all human actions have making a product as their end. As the Philosopher says in the same paragraph, man's ultimate end consists in happiness (*eudaimonea*) which is an activity immanent in man. Hence, an act of production can never be for man an end in itself, but only a means to man's final end. This can be seen in that actions of human making can always be looked at from two

perspectives—in a particular way that focuses on the particular end of making and in a comprehensive way that focuses on the ultimate end of the maker and asks whether the particular end of making the product can truly be ordered to the ultimate end of the maker—that is, be perfective of his happiness.

**Reply to Objection #5:** Human freedom consists in man's ability to participate in God's governance of creation through reasoned acts of will rather than through simple efficient causality as in the case of inanimate objects. So, far from being an external constraint on human freedom, the moral law constitutes man's freedom, for what is outside of God's governance is outside of the divine causality—and therefore outside of existence. The source of man's capacity for self-determination lies not in his will's presumed status as a *primum*, a first in the causal order, but rather in his will's manifest status as rational inclination (*inclinatio sequens formam intellectam*, an inclination following the form of reason) (ST I.82.2). Man's rational nature entails that he have a rational will ordered not to particular goods as apprehended by the senses but rather to universal or rational good as apprehended by the intellect. Just as the intellect naturally and necessarily adheres to first principles, such as the principles of identity and non-contradiction, but not of necessity to contingent propositions until they have been demonstrated as following necessarily from first principles, so too, the will naturally and of necessity adheres to the last end, which is God and beatitude, but not of necessity to contingent goods until they have been demonstrated as leading necessarily to the last end. This is so because man's knowledge of the universal good, which is God, is grasped not directly but rather indirectly through particular goods. Because these particular goods are limited and have their good only by remote participation in God's goodness, these goods are not able to present the Universal Good in anything more than a remote way and therefore are not able to compel reason to command the will to embrace them.

Thus the objection fails to appreciate the analogical nature of freedom, mistaking human freedom (which is conditioned freedom) for divine freedom (which is unconditioned). Hence, it is false to assume that in order to be truly free, human freedom must be absolutely unconditioned. For, as stated above, only God's freedom is unconditioned. Hence, it does not follow that law in general or Catholic teaching on social communications in particular is a constraint on the human communicator's freedom. Rather, as a particular manifestation of God's governance, Catholic teaching on social communications enables and enhances man's freedom, since law and reason are necessary conditions that make human freedom possible.

## Notes

1. See *Inter Mirifica*, 2. “The Church recognizes that these media, if properly utilized, can be of great service to mankind, since they greatly contribute to men’s entertainment and instruction as well as to the spread and support of the Kingdom of God. The Church recognizes, too, that men can employ these media contrary to the plan of the Creator and to their own loss. Indeed, the Church experiences maternal grief at the harm all too often done to society by their evil use. Hence, this sacred Synod, attentive to the watchful concern manifested by the Supreme Pontiffs and Bishops in a matter of such great importance, judges it to be its duty to treat of the principal questions linked with the media of social communication. It trusts, moreover, that the teaching and regulations it thus sets forth will serve to promote, not only the eternal welfare of Christians, but also the progress of all mankind.” See also *Ethics in Communications*, 4: “[the Church] desires to support those who are professional involved in communication by setting out positive principles to assist them in their work.”

2. See *Vigilante Cura*. See also *Ethics in Communications*, 3.

3. Although the terms “social communication” and “mass communication” are often used interchangeably, they do not always mean the same thing. Use of the term social communications places the focus on the social nature of communications while use of the terms mass communication or mass media places the focus more narrowly on the technology and process of communicating with vast audiences and the social and cultural effects of using those technologies. Thus social communications has the advantage, as a term, of wider connotation; all communication is social but not all communication is mass communication. The term social communication was adopted by the Fathers of Vatican Council II in their decree *Inter Mirifica*, promulgated in 1962, and has become the preferred term within documentation of the Roman Catholic Church for reference to media, especially mass media.

4. *Inter Mirifica*, 4.

5. For a current list, see:

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/pccs/index.htm](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/index.htm)

6. See “The Rapid Development,” 4. For another example, see Miranda Prorsus: “...there are not wanting those who neither understand nor

recognise [sic] the teaching function of the Church; some even oppose it by every possible means. The[re] are, as you know, those who are moved by an inordinate desire for gain; or, deceived by errors, they do not have a balanced view on human dignity and freedom; or finally, they give full acceptance to a false opinion about the real meaning of art.”

7. What Pope Pius XI wrote in 1934 about cinema in *Vigilante Cura* can be applied to all the instruments of social communications: “We called to mind that it is necessary to apply to the cinema the supreme rule which must direct and regulate the great gift of art in order that it may not find itself in continual conflict with Christian morality or even with simple human morality based upon the natural law. The essential purpose of art, its *raison d’être*, is to assist in the perfection of the moral personality, which is man, and for this reason it must itself be moral. And We concluded amidst the manifest approval of that elect body—the memory is still dear to Us—by recommending to them the necessity of making the motion picture “moral, an influence for good morals, an educator.”

8. See *Aristotle*, *De Anima* iii, 7 (431b).

9. See ST I.14.16.

10. Ralph McInerny, *Ethica Thomistica*, revised edition (Washington, D.C.: CUA Press, 1997) pp. 38-39.

11. See ST I.14.16. See also *McInerny*, pp. 39-40.

12. For example, see *The Rapid Development*, 4-6

13. *The Rapid Development*, 4.

14. *Communio et Progressio*, 2, italics mine.

15. See *Aetatis Novae*, 23-33.

16. See *The Ideal Film, Exhortations of His Holiness Pius XII to representatives of the world of the cinema* (June 21, 1955 - October 25, 1955)

[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_xii/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_exh\\_25101955\\_ideal-film\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-xii_exh_25101955_ideal-film_en.html).

(Accessed Oct. 22, 2005.)

17. *Veritatis Splendor*, 88

18. The terms come from Aristotle. See *Ethics* vi, 5 1140a-b. See also *Metaphysics* ix, 8 1050a.

19. See ST I-II.57.4.

20. See *Communio et Progressio*, 11: “Communication is more than the expression of ideas and the indication of emotion. At its most profound level it is the giving of self in love.” See also *Ethics in Communications*, 3: “Indeed all human communication is grounded in the communication among Father, Son, and Spirit. But more than that, Trinitarian communion reaches out to humankind: The Son is the Word, eternally ‘spoken’ by the Father; and in and through Jesus Christ, Son and Word made flesh, God communicates himself and his salvation to women and men.” “An additional note: While communication is rightly predicated of both God and the human person, it is not predicated of both in the same way, but rather analogically. God IS overflowing love (See 1 Jn 4:8. But man only has an obediential potency for graced overflowing love.

21. *Ethics in Communications*, 3.

22. See McInerney, p. 4 and pp. 12-34. See also Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1.

23. See *Ethics in Communications*, 21: The fundamental ethical principle is this: The human person and the human community are the end and measure of the use of the media of social communication; communication should be by persons to persons for the integral development of persons.”

24. The centrality of moral questions in a highly technical world has been a leitmotif of Pope John Paul II’s teaching pontificate. For two of many examples, see the encyclicals *Laborem Exercens* and *Veritatis Splendor*.

25. See Karlheinz Schmidthus, “Decree on the Instruments of Social Communication,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Herbert Vorgrimler, general editor (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967). p. 99.

26. Helpful here is a distinction between negative and positive conceptions of freedom. Servais Pinckaers has termed negative freedom “freedom of indifference” and positive freedom “freedom for excellence.” See *Servais Pinckaers, The Sources of Christian Ethics* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995) Pp 327-78.

27. See *Aetatis Novae*, 4. “As media become ever more intertwined with people’s daily lives, they influence how people understand the meaning of life itself. Indeed, the power of media extends to defining not only what people will think but even what they will think about. Reality, for many, is what the media recognize as real; what media do not acknowledge seems of little importance.”

28. The definition of the rhetor’s art as recognizing the available means of persuasion comes from *Aristotle*, specifically Book 1, Chapter 2 of *Aristotle’s Rhetoric*. “Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion.” For more on choice as constitutive of rhetoric, see Nick Turnbull “Rhetorical Agency as a Property of Questioning,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 37.3 (2004) pp. 207-222.