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Communicating the Justice and Peace of God in Africa Today

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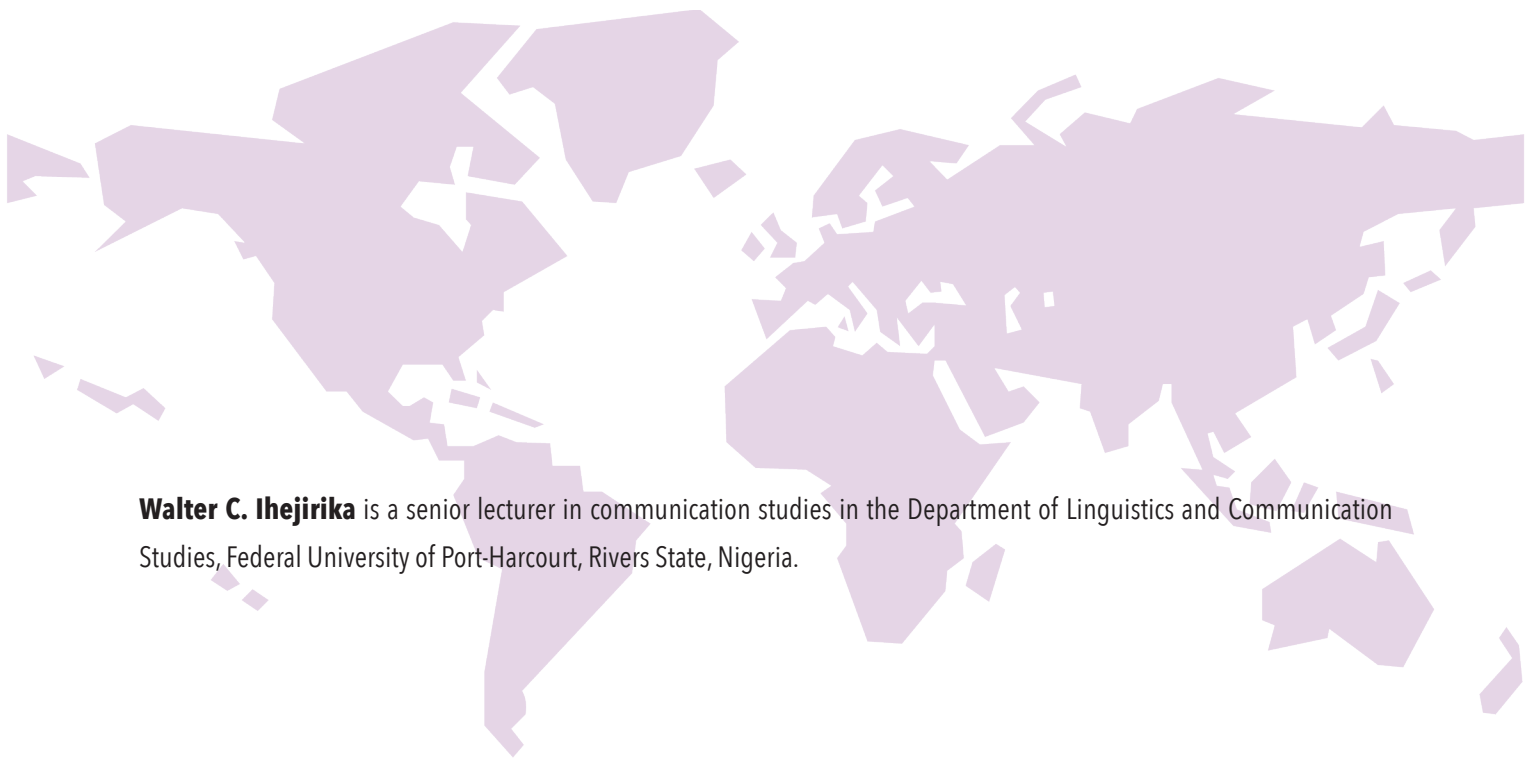
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Catholics & Cultures

INTRODUCTION

A religious colloquium to consider the future of Catholicism in Africa could be likened to a liminal experience. Van Gennep was the first to use this term in his classic book on the rite of passage which he defined as "rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position, and age."[1] Van Gennep indicated that all such rites are marked by a threefold progression of successive ritual stages: (1) separation or the pre-liminal (derived from limen, Latin for "threshold"), when a person or group becomes detached from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or from an earlier set of social conditions; (2) margin or the liminal, when the state of the ritual subject is ambiguous; he is no longer in the old state and has not yet reached the new one; and (3) aggregation or the post-liminal, when the ritual subject enters a new stable state with its own rights and obligations. Van Gennep thus defined the liminal place as a gap between the ordered worlds where almost anything could happen.[2]

Victor Turner, drawing inspiration from Van Gennep develops the concept of liminality further. According to him, major liminal occasions are when a society takes cognizance of itself, takes stock of a people's place in the emotional, spiritual, and social world, and reinterprets the overarching pattern of social relations that define social structure. In liminal spaces, people can stand outside of their normal social roles and embrace alternative social arrangements and values.

People living a liminal experience constitute what Turner called a *communitas,* which is different from the structured community. Communitas is an intense community spirit, the feeling of great social equality, solidarity, and togetherness. Communitas is an acute point of community. It takes community to the next level and allows the whole of the community to share a common experience, usually through a rite of passage. This brings everyone onto an equal level; even if you are higher in position, you have been lower and you know what that is like.

Every society must, from time to time, have liminal occasions. As a temporary state,

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1   van Gennep, *The Rite of Passage*, cited in Turner, *Forests of Symbols*, 94.
2   Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 576-577.

Catholics&Cultures

it allows individuals and groups to have moments of self-reflection, an opportunity to look critically at the society they have left behind and imagine the society they have not yet entered. Liminal experiences are moments of dreams, visions, and projections for a better future. Turner aptly summed them up thus: "I see liminality as a phase in social life in which this confrontation between 'activity which has no structure' and its 'structured results' produces in men their highest pitch of self-consciousness."[3]

This international colloquium is one such moment for the Church in Africa to take stock of the past and visualize the future that is not yet there. In this environment, we form a communitas. The Catholic Church in Africa is standing at the threshold of a new era, looking critically at the past she has left behind and imagining the future that is yet to come. This colloquium is made more significant because it is taking place within the context of the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy. Every Jubilee Year marks a new beginning; the Holy Door is opened, and God's people are ushered into a new era, representing eternity, the intrusion of eternity into temporality.

This paper examines how the Catholic Church can effectively carry out her mission to communicate the justice and peace of God on the continent. The paper addresses primarily members of the Church in Africa, for it is through a lived experience of justice and peace that she can communicate the same to the rest of the continent. The words of the great doctor of the Church, Gregory of Nazianzus, are pertinent here:

> With these thoughts, I am occupied night and day: they waste my marrow, and feed upon my flesh, and will not allow me to be confident or to look up. They depress my soul, and abase my mind, and fetter my tongue, and make me consider, not the position of a prelate, or the guidance and direction of others, which is far beyond my powers; but how I myself am to escape the wrath to come, and to scrape off from myself somewhat of the rust of vice. A man must himself be cleansed, before cleansing others: himself become wise, that he may

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3   Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors,* 255.

make others wise; become light, and then give light: draw near to God, and so bring others near; be hallowed, then hallow them; be possessed of hands to lead others by the hand, of wisdom to give advice.[4]

The aim of this paper is, therefore, to highlight how the Church in Africa can communicate the justice and peace of God by effective use of the means and skills of communication.

THE RESEARCH FIELD: MEDIA, RELIGION, AND CULTURE

This paper is situated within the research field of media, religion, and culture. As distinctive fields of study, media studies and religious studies have covered a long history. But the effort to bring together scholars in both fields, to bridge the "wide cultural gap of misunderstanding" which has separated them and assuage the mutual suspicion harbored in both camps, has been very recent.[5] This divide is derived from the sociological foundations of early media studies which did not see religion playing a significant role in nation-building. Religious leaders, on their own part, saw media content as trivializing and corrupting religious beliefs and practices.

The field of study which today goes by the name "Media, Religion, and Culture" has its beginning in the early 1980s. In this period, religious and media scholars began to recognize that an interdisciplinary effort was needed if they wished to chart the varied configurations of contemporary society. The interdisciplinary effort crystallized into the network of scholars who, without abandoning their original fields of specialization in either communication/media studies, sociology, anthropology, or religious studies, were able to carve out a new field of interest which focused on topics within the intersection of media and religion in given cultural milieus.

This group of scholars is currently organized under the umbrella of the International Society of Media, Religion, and Culture (ISMRC) and the Communication, Religion, and Culture Working Group of the International Association of Media and Communication Research. The distinctive characteristic of research in

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4   Knight, "Oration 2."
5   Clark and Hoover, "At the Intersection of Media, Culture, and Religion: A Bibliographic Essay," 15.

Catholics&Cultures

this field is that it transcends the notion that religion, media, and culture constitute separate or equivalent and competing social categories and allow for the possibility of convergence of the two within contemporary culture. In Africa, this field of study has witnessed a gradual but rapid growth.[6]

Methodologically, this field of research adopts a triangulation of theories and methods. Being interdisciplinary, scholars in the field of media, religion, and culture often engage in a bricolage of theories and methods deriving from social science, psychology, theology, and anthropology. Thus, research in this field can be both basic/theoretical and applied. The present paper is applied in nature. As Ihejirika and Omego noted, "Applied research uses knowledge (or results) acquired from basic research in finding solutions of immediate practical problems. The essence of applied research is that it has a practical application."[7]

In line with the tenets of applied research, this paper applies the teachings of the magisterium of the Catholic Church and relevant findings in the field of communication and media studies to articulate the effective way for the Church in Africa to communicate the justice and peace of God on the continent.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

- **The Catholic magisterium on justice, peace, and reconciliation**

In articulating the pathways toward peace in the modern world, the fathers of the Second Vatican Council, in the document *Gaudium et Spes,* underscored the root causes of conflict:

> In order to build up peace above all, the causes of discord among men, especially injustice, which foment wars must be rooted out. Not a few of these causes come from excessive economic inequalities and from putting off the steps needed to remedy them. Other causes of discord, however, have their source in the desire to dominate and in a contempt for persons. And, if we look for deeper causes, we find them in human envy, distrust, pride, and other egotistical passions. Man cannot bear so many ruptures in the harmony of things. Conse-

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6   Ihejirika, "Current Trends in the Study of Media, Religion, and Culture in Africa," 1-60.
7   Ihejirika and Omego, *Research Methods in Linguistics and Communication Studies*, 9-10.

quently, the world is constantly beset by strife and violence between men, even when no war is being waged.[8]

The quotation indicates the close nexus between justice and peace. Lack of justice, that is injustice, foments wars and conflicts which are indicative of lack of peace.

Unfortunately, Africa's collective memory is painfully scarred with many instances of conflict and wars. Because of this painful past, the current thrust of the evangelizing mission of the Church in Africa is to foster reconciliation. This was the basis for the convocation of the Second Synod of Bishops for Africa. The synod examined extensively how the Church in Africa as the Family of God can serve as a force opening paths to reconciliation, justice, and peace.

Without reconciliation, there cannot be justice and peace. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI emphasized this fact in his post-synodal exhortation to Africa:

> Human peace obtained without justice is illusory and ephemeral. Human justice which is not the fruit of reconciliation in the "truth of love" (Eph 4:15) remains incomplete; it is not authentic justice . . . Justice is never disembodied. It needs to be anchored in consistent human decisions. A charity which fails to respect justice and the rights of all is false. I therefore encourage Christians to become exemplary in the area of justice and charity (Matt 5:19-20).[9]

Reconciliation is the ultimate objective in all post-conflict societies and post-conflict reconstruction processes. It has been referred to as acknowledgement and repentance from the perpetrators and forgiveness from the victims,[10] or as nonlethal coexistence,[11] or as democratic decision-making and reintegration.

Some scholars consider reconciliation as incompatible with justice. The "justice versus reconciliation," "justice versus peace," "justice versus truth" debates all emphasize that justice is retributive and reconciliation is restorative. However, another

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8   Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 83.
9   Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*, 18.
10   See Avruch and Vejarano, "Truth and Reconciliation Commissions," 4.
11   See Tepperman, "Truth and Consequences," 128.

Catholics&Cultures

school of thought believes that certain mechanisms of retributive justice, as well as restorative justice, can support reconciliation in particular contexts.[12] Reconciliation consolidates and builds up justice and peace.

The mission of the Church in Africa is to become an active agent of reconciliation as the authentic pathway to justice and peace. Thus, the central questions which this paper addresses are the following: what are the language, mechanisms, skills, and tools necessary for effective communication of reconciliation on the continent? And again, how can the Church in Africa harness the great opportunities which the world of communication offers, especially the new media, to preach the message of reconciliation to the African continent?

To answer these questions, we shall first present the current state of communication in Africa and then highlight the role communication can play in the effort of the African Church to achieve her mission of promoting reconciliation, justice, and peace.

- **Africa in the new era of mediated communication**

The early 1990s ushered in two major revolutions in Africa: a wave of political democratization which swept through many countries and a concomitant democratization of the airwaves. The dismantling of state monopolies of the broadcast media and the commercializing of airtime and ownership have radically altered the media landscape, with significant consequences for religious communication and practice.[13]

The number of both radio and television stations increased dramatically in the 1990s. Citing Panos, Hackett noted that, between 1993 and 2001, the number of

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12   See Kerr and Mobekk, *Peace and Justice: Seeking Accountability after War*.

13   See the following scholars' work: Francis B. Nyamnjoh, "Global and Local Trends in Media Ownership and Control: Implications for Cultural Creativity in Africa" in *Situating Globality: African Agency in the Appropriation of Global Culture*, edited by Wim van Binsbergen, et al., 57-89 (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors, eds. *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2006); Richard Fardon and Graham Furniss, eds., *African Broadcast Cultures: Radio in Transition* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000); Wim van Binsbergen, Rijk van Dijk, and Jan-Bart Gewald, eds., *Situating Globality: African Agency in the Appropriation of Global Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

radio stations had grown from forty to 426 stations. They also became more diversified and commercialized in that period, moving from the region's capital cities to local neighborhoods where they broadcast their programs predominantly in FM. Most of these are community radio stations, and most countries have at least twenty.[14] This is why Africa is known as the "radio continent."[15] It is often said that there are more homes in Africa with radios than access to running water.

Citing various sources, the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) provided a good picture of the communication situation in Africa. It noted that radio remains the most ubiquitous means of communication with at least 75% of households in developing countries having access to a radio. In eleven countries surveyed across Africa, local commercial radio grew by an average of 360% between 2000 and 2006, whereas community radio grew by a striking 1,386%, on average, over the same period. AM/FM radio counts for 86% of the total time adults aged 25-54 spend listening to three main audio platforms. Adults listen to AM/FM radio eight times more than satellite radio and seventeen times more than Internet audio streaming. The number of those listening to a foreign radio station declines when local media become freer and provide what local people most want to hear. According to BBC audience research, in most cases, the BBC achieved large audiences (20% or more) only where the choice of local services was limited to five or fewer stations. As choice grows, BBC audiences fall. Radio in Tanzania has become more interactive over time, with more radio call-in shows to encourage participation. While 76% of radio listeners listen to radio call-in shows, only 5% had actually called in to a show in the last 12 months.[16]

Along with radio, mobile phones are the most accessible forms of technology. A key feature of African mobile phone use is its convergence with radio listening. As the UNESCO report revealed, among regular mobile users in Zambia, 33% said they listen to the radio via their handset on a weekly basis, and 25% said they listen on a daily basis. Unlike the use of mobile Internet, radio listening is more evenly

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14   Hackett, "Devil Bustin' Satellites," 168-206.
15   Mytton, Graham. "From Saucepan to Dish," 21-41.
16   United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), "World Radio Day 2012: Statistics on Radio."

Catholics&Cultures

spread across urban and rural users. However, only 8% of monthly mobile phone users own a mobile phone personally.[17]

Unlike former revolutions, the digital revolution has a faster global reach. Despite the existence of the digital divide, developing nations are quicker to appropriate the fruits of this revolution than former ones. Thanks to smart phones and mobile internet, access to the internet is growing apace in developing countries as in more developed ones. According to the Internet Society, smart phones sales are fast over-taking the sale of personal computers in many countries, and as of December 2011, there was more than 50% access to mobile broadband in developing countries.[18]

Using Nigeria as an example, a phenomenal increase in the past decade has been recorded both in teledensity and internet usage as indicated by the information gathered from the Nigerian Communications Commission[19] and the International Telecommunication Union:[20]

Figure 1: Nigeria's Teledensity and Internet Usage from 2000 to 2015[21]

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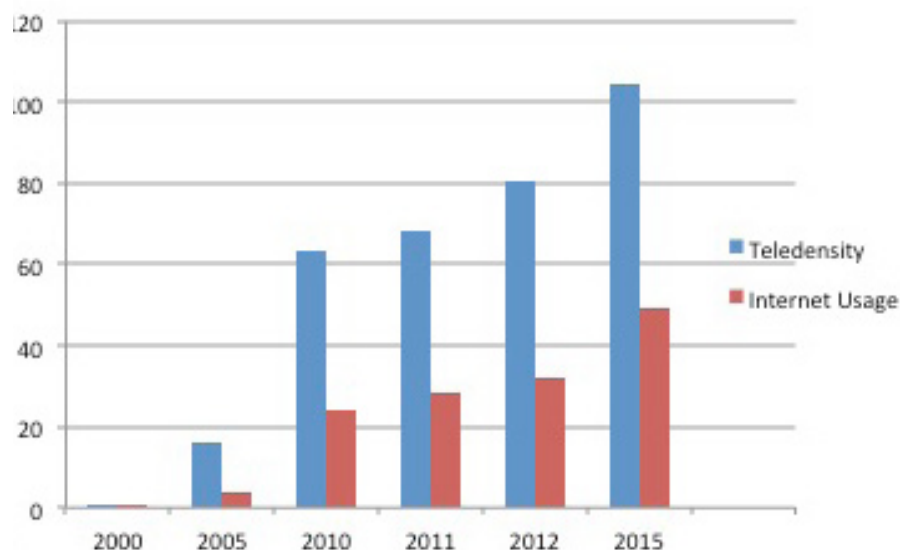
17   UNESCO, "World Radio Day 2012: Statistics on Radio."
18   Internet Society, "Global Internet User Survey 2012."
19   Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), "Subscriber Statistics: Years 2004-2016."
20   International Telecommunication Union (ITU), "2015 Global ICT Development Index: Nigeria."
21   I created this graph, using the data available in the following three sources: (1) Nigerian Commu-

Although Nigeria's 49.3% of internet penetration may be low (compared to countries in North America, Western Europe, and developed Asia Pacific having between 80% and 100%), still Nigeria is ranked eighth in the world in terms of internet usage, and the country is seen as one of the fastest-growing broadband markets. It is clear that many Nigerians have ample access to mobile telephony and the mobile internet.

These encouraging steps taken by the continent in the communication arena offers the Church in Africa an ample means to support her mission of communicating the justice and peace of God to the continent. This is what should be done:

MEANS OF COMMUNICATING THE JUSTICE AND PEACE OF GOD TO AFRICA

• **Imbibing the spirituality of communion**

The spirituality of communion was first proposed by Pope Saint John Paul II. And in *Africae Munus*, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI affirms it as foundation on which the African Church can build her ministry of reconciliation, justice, and peace. The main elements of this spirituality are:

> The ability to perceive the light of the mystery of the Trinity shining on the faces of brothers and sisters around us, to be attentive to our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as "those who are a part of me," in order to share their joys and sufferings, to sense their desires and attend to their needs, to offer them deep and genuine friendship, the ability as well to recognize all that is positive in the other so as to welcome it and prize it as a gift that God gives me through that person, in a way that transcends by far the individual concerned, who thus becomes a channel of divine graces; and finally, the ability "to 'make room' for our brothers and sisters, bearing 'each other's burdens' (Gal 6:2) and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism,

nications Commission (NCC), "Subscriber Statistics: Years 2004-2016"; (2) International Telecommunication Union (ITU), "2015 Global ICT Development Index: Nigeria"; and (3) Internet Society. "Global Internet User Survey 2012."

Catholics*&*Cultures

distrust, and jealousy."[22]

The spirituality of communion is by all means a communicative element. *Communio et Progressio*, the Church's document on social communication, states that the highest point of communication is the giving of self in love.[23] For Christians, therefore, the ultimate aim of communication is the promotion of understanding, love, unity, communion, and community. The true meaning of Christian communication is love, which entails giving something of one's own existence to others so that others in their own unique and special way may grow to be what God wants them to be. It will thus be correct if one defines Christianity as a religion of interpersonal relationship: relationship between God as father and human beings as his children. It is also the relationship among human beings as children of God, brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

When translated into practical language, the spirituality of communion entails fraternal love and service, the "sharing" of one's charisms and other personal spiritual gifts with others within the small intimate circle of friends. It entails the capacity to negotiate and dialogue, which are requisite skills in the process of reconciliation.

The art of negotiation and dialogue requires openness and honesty on the part of all the parties involved. Participants in genuine dialogue and negotiation make an effort not to exaggerate their self-concept. When a party at the negotiation or dialogue table has an exaggerated concept of self, it can inhibit the possibility of constant self-examination and knowledge of the other. Appropriate self-concept and knowledge of the other lead to accurate perception. Inaccurate perception of the other is often the result of stereotyping, that is, a generalization held by many members of a society about people, places, or events. As Gamble and Gamble noted, when we stereotype, instead of responding to the communication or cues of individuals, we create expectations, assume they are valid, and behave as if they had occurred.[24] Stereotyping leads us to oversimplify, overgeneralize, and grossly exaggerate what we observe. Stereotyping leads to prejudices; it is dangerous and

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22   Pope Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*, 35.
23   Pontifical Council for Social Communication, *Communio et Progressio*, 11.
24   Gamble and Gamble, *Communication Works*, 95.

can be extremely harmful. People who stereotype are lazy perceivers and ineffective communicators.

Negotiation and dialogue generate understanding and insight—insight into ourselves and others. Through these communication encounters, we are able to learn why we are trusting or distrusting, whether we can make our thoughts and feelings clear, under what conditions we have the power to influence others, and whether we can effectively make decisions and resolve conflicts and problems.

The spirituality of communion leads to cultural fluency, that is, familiarity with cultures: their natures, how they work, and ways they intertwine. One of the givens of Africa is the existence of diversity. The imperative of intercultural communication is to reduce the strangeness of strangers, that is, to encourage openness to differences by adding to one's storehouse of knowledge. As Inoue articulated, cultural fluency means "the appropriate application of respect, empathy, flexibility, patience, interest, curiosity, openness, the willingness to suspend judgment, tolerance for ambiguity, and sense of humor."[25] And as Glazier noted in a separate article, it is:

> the ability to step back and forth between two cultures, to embrace your own culture while understanding its relationship to others. It is about being able to communicate with and for the other, and being able to express another's perspective, another's cultural beliefs, alongside your own. It is about ease of interaction with the 'other.' It is about exploring and becoming aware of cultural differences, as well as, ultimately, understanding what impact those differences have on one's status and one's opportunities in the larger context . . . . [it] happens through . . . engaging *in one another's company* . . . . Company means 'companionship, fellowship, society.'[26]

It is clear, then, that the appropriate language for the communication of justice and peace in Africa is through the practice of the spirituality of communion. This entails charity and sharing among members of the ecclesial community. It entails mutual appreciation and respect. The spirituality of communion encourages us to

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25   Inoue, "Cultural Fluency as a Guide to Effective Intercultural Communication."
26   Glazier, "Developing Cultural Fluency," 144-145.

Catholics&Cultures

acknowledge our differences but at the same time endeavor to understand each other through dialogue and cultural fluency. The more the African continent is permeated with the spirituality of communion, the more justice and peace there will be on the continent.

THE NEW MEDIA, COMMUNITY, JUSTICE, AND PEACE

More than the other means of communication, the characteristics of the new media resonate more closely with the spirituality of communion. The pertinent characteristics are those of interactivity and convergence.

- **Interactivity and communal sharing**

Interactivity is the enhanced involvement of the user in the communication process. Users are enabled to become active participants in the many media platforms, often adding content. Through enhanced telephony, the mainstay of the radio medium is now the call-in programs. Interactivity also manifests itself in various forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC).[27] Through interactions, the communication process becomes participatory. The World Association of Christian Communication (WACC) rightly noted: "When communication is inclusive and invites participation, it makes worldviews and collective experiences richer and more vivid. More images, thoughts, and points-of-view are added to the public sphere."[28]

Active interaction and participation among the members of a faith community is indispensable for the continued existence of the group. The array of instruments and infrastructures made available by the new information and communication technology makes it easier than before to be in touch with loved ones and community members via the mobile telephone, short message services, and various social network platforms. Among members of the Church, computer-mediated communication enables faster circulation of information especially about upcoming religious activities and other social events, including burials of members. Also,

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27   See Barnes, *Computer-Mediated Communication.*
28   World Association of Christian Communication (WACC), "Communication for All: Sharing WACC Principles," 3.

Catholics&Cultures

some priests and other pastoral agents send out occasional inspirational messages to church members, especially during important liturgical seasons like Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. These messages encourage the recipients and enhance their faith.[29]

Through faster and more accessible means of communication, it is now easier for church members in good positions to send out information to unemployed members about new job opportunities; it is now easier to know church members who are in difficulty and extend a helping hand. The interactive element of the new media helps to reduce the distance which may have existed between various sectors of the Church such as the hierarchy and laity; lukewarm members and active members; needy, impoverished members and the well-to-do.

There is no doubt that, in the past, the Catholic Church in Nigeria—as in other parts of Africa—was very deficient in interpersonal relations. The Nigerian theologian Elochukwu E. Uzukwu lamented this lack and made the call for a listening Church, one in which both the leaders and the led have large ears for dialogue and communal sharing.[30] As I discovered in my seminal research on the role of Nigerian televangelism in the conversion of Catholics to Pentecostal churches, communal sharing was the major communicative challenge which Pentecostals and their televangelists posed to the Catholic Church.[31]

- **New media and the dismantling of inequities**

It is true that the media, especially the new media, can provide platforms for accentuating the projection of bias and stereotypes of peoples and cultures, but they are also wonderful means of knowing about other people and their cultures. The internet makes it easier to get information about other people; people also have a greater possibility of letting others know about their culture through social networking platforms like Facebook and blogs. Gaining knowledge of the other, as already indicated, is an indispensable element of dialogue and cultural fluency. Getting to know others, their social milieu, and their sorrows and joys are part of the spiri-

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29   See Ihejirika, *"Duc in altum*: New Media and Evangelization"; Ihejirika, *The e-Priest.*
30   Uzukwu, *A Listening Church.*
31   Ihejirika, *From Catholicism to Pentecostalism*.

Catholics&Cultures

tuality of communion. A great deal of this awareness and appreciation is achieved through the appropriation of new media.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI underscored the role of new media in community building. His 2009 message for World Communications Day focused attention on the theme, "New Technologies, New Relationships: Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue, and Friendship." The pope noted that the new digital technologies are indeed bringing about fundamental shifts in patterns of communication and human relationships. He made clear the extraordinary potential of these new technologies, noting that they are used to promote human understanding and solidarity.[32]

Apart from building community through creating cultural awareness, there is another important role that new media play in peace-building. As the fathers of Vatican II noted, the existence of injustice and the unbridled desire to dominate others are inimical to community living. The critical theories of the media, especially the political-economic theories, focus attention on how hegemonic forces in society have always appropriated the mass media as instruments of domination and political control.[33] The masses are often fed with "sanitized" information in order to maintain the status quo. Dissenting voices are often shut down, and people with contrary views are not allowed access to the public sphere.

But as the communication technological determinism theory underscores,[34] every new development in communication technology engenders a new way of life and culture. During the Renaissance in Europe, for example, the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg altered the structure of society. The possibility of unrestricted circulation of information threatened the hegemonic power of political and religious authorities through the promotion of mass literacy. The mass publication of reading materials broke the monopoly the literate elite held on education and learning, and helped to bring up a middle class.

A far greater social revolution has occurred in the digital age. Digital literacy is far

32 Benedict XVI, "New Technologies, New Relationships."
33 See Hodkinson, *Media, Culture and Society: An Introduction*.
34 See McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*.

easier to acquire than earlier forms of literacy. Computer and mobile telephony allow anybody with imagination the opportunity to be a media creator without recourse to preexisting authority. One can be a publisher, a photographer, or a broadcaster using any of the platforms provided by new media like WordPress, YouTube, Facebook, etc.

New media thus fosters a highly democratic spirit, because things which were hitherto the special preserve of the rich and mighty are now accessible to the "common man." New media has provided voices to the voiceless. The Arab Spring—the political revolution which swept through most of the Northern African countries between 2010 and 2012, toppling strongly entrenched dictatorships—was largely predicated on new media. Images and texts were freely circulated among young people through Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms. Such circulation of information was unthinkable in those countries in former times.

In Nigeria, there is a strong view shared by many that the Boko Haram insurgency, despite the religious undertones, could be a revolution by young people against the established northern oligarchs, who have for decades fed them only with "sanitized information" through the BBC-Hausa and other state-owned information outlets. Their rebellion could be against the harsh socioeconomic situation to which their elite has subjected them, in contrast to the images of development they now see from other parts of the country and beyond, thanks to new media.

It is an established fact that new media is a potent weapon for exposing, combatting, and dismantling various forms of injustice and undue domination. It provides avenues for expression, and everybody can be heard. If people are denied access in the mainline media, they migrate to social media. In this way, new media helps us to build up a more just and egalitarian society.

- **New media, convergence, and community building**

Another key characteristic of new media is that it is connected or networked. Digital systems thrive on their interconnectedness, as exemplified by the internet. Various components of the modern world have become linked together, giving rise to

Catholics&Cultures

contemporary society's being known as the networked society.[35] The internet is the engine driving the networked society, bringing about the convergence of hitherto disparate media platforms. Through the process of convergence, one can now do any number of things online—read the newspaper, listen to the radio, or watch television—and, at the same time, make telephone calls. These activities were formally separate and required specialized instruments to be carried out.

A networked society in which disparate components are converging together is a wake-up call for every institution in the world to the need to work as a team—or perish. The U.S. commission that investigated the September 11, 2001, terrorists' attacks on the country noted that one of the major causes was the lack of synergy between relevant national security agencies;[36] people were operating with a "one-man-show" attitude, each group trying to outshine the other.

The strength of the Catholic Church has been the strong sense of convergence: various components integrating under the headship of the pontiff. Every effort must be made to consolidate the collaborative ministry of the Church. This need for cohesion informed the changes which Pope Francis made in the communication dicastery of the Vatican Curia. In 2015, he created a new Secretariat for Communication with the motu proprio, "The current communication context."[37] The new dicastery oversees all of the Vatican's communications offices, including Vatican Radio, *L'Osservatore Romano*, Vatican Television Center, the Holy See Press Office, the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Vatican Internet Service, Vatican Typography, the Photo Service, and the Vatican Publishing House. Hitherto, these offices operated almost independently of each other. But in the era of convergence, the Church's communication efforts must be unified and coordinated.

EPILOGUE

In his post-synodal exhortation, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI mandated the Church in Africa to be a minister of reconciliation as the right pathway to achiev-

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35   See Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*.

36   National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*.

37   Francis, "Apostolic Letter Issued Motu Proprio for the Establishment of the Secretariat for Communication."

ing justice and peace. In this paper, we have made the point that the language need-ed to communicate the justice and peace of God in the continent is the language of love, that is, when the church as institution and her members are permeated with the spirituality of communion. We have articulated the practical demands of this spirituality and how they harmonize with the major elements of new media.

We have indicated how the application of new media's instruments and an integra-tion of the new culture of this media can facilitate the demands of the spirituality of communion. For the African Church to be successful in her continued mission of promoting justice and peace, it is imperative that communication move from the periphery and become central to this effort.

The Church in Africa is being challenged by the emerging culture of new media to promote interactivity and convergence. She is challenged to live out the culture of greater transparency and democracy, ensuring that all sectors of the Church are in-volved in matters affecting their well-being. The culture of new media is also one of expressiveness and sharing of information and ideas. When these elements of the new culture are integrated and manifested in the life of the Church, she becomes a very powerful witness to reconciliation, justice, and peace.

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