

Global communication online

Archbishop Celli on the blogger convention



“The Church has something to learn from bloggers”, that is, from those who communicate through the internet, beginning “with their way of freely expressing themselves in an up-to-date language”. This is what Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli, President of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, said in an interview given to our newspaper at the close of the first Blog Meet, a gathering of bloggers — Catholics and non-Catholics — held on 2 May in the Vatican. It was the idea of the Pontifical Council for Culture, organized in collaboration with the dicastery for Social Communications. “Indeed”, the prelate added “we still experience difficulty due to a certain type of ecclesial language that the young generations often find hard to understand. Blogs are sites of authenticity and, at the same time of provocation. They help us to grow, to take a look about us and to understand that in order to be heard we have to use language that can be understood”. In this interview we have the “closing balance” of the recently concluded meeting, as stated by Archbishop Celli.

What was the impact of the first meeting of the blogosphere?

It was very positive. This meeting was different from the others in that there was an air of expectation, but also of great excitement. In a certain sense I saw the future already present; I felt was having a first-hand experience of the dynamics of today’s world of communications. It is important that two entities of the Holy See — the dicastery for culture that came up with the idea and we who joined in — have given a sign of their positive interest in the blogosphere. We showed that we recognize the importance of this reality of communications and are aware of its value in the social and cultural field, as well as having a great interest in the blogosphere’s openness to religious topics.

Do you think that the Holy See and the Church in general, has something to learn from the way in which the bloggers communicate?

One particular feature of digital communications is the fact that it is a grass-roots initiative, not something official or institutional. One and all can bring to bear their ideas, their personal witness in this area. This is one of the particularly good points of new communication technologies. This

interactivity, this dimension of extreme openness and communication is something in which we are interested. If, indeed, it is true that every disciple of Christ is called to bear witness in his or her environment and to be a leaven, the dynamic of blogging favours this mission of evangelization. It is an area in which Christians can be present with their sensitivity, values, value judgements, and can open-heartedly express what they are feeling. A while ago, I suggested launching a blog to a certain Archbishop, now retired, who is more than 75 years old, but very alert, sensitive and attentive. At first he was a little taken aback by my suggestion, but a year later he came to thank me. In fact, he had discovered that because of his blog, his pastoral dimension had not come to an end; rather, thanks to the new technology and the personal style of the blog, he now had new opportunities for rich, dynamic and lively human relationships. In short, he had discovered that, even though he was “emeritus”, he could continue to dialogue with many people. Christians should feel a spontaneous desire to proclaim and share their faith. The proclamation of the Word from heart to heart, from mouth to mouth, is part of the nature of our faith. But today, in these new forms, such as blogging, it finds a new area of expression that is truly boundless.

Could interaction with bloggers possibly help our Vatican dicasteries to make their own communication more effective?

I am absolutely convinced of this. On blogs there is open communication with up-to-date language. We still experience difficulty due to a certain type of ecclesial language that young people find hard to understand. Blogs are sites of authenticity and, at the same time, of provocation. They help us to grow, to take a look about us and to understand that in order to be heard we have to use language that can be understood. In his address to the Plenary Assembly of our Pontifical Council last February, the Pope recalled that the human person not only uses language, but “dwells” in it. Therefore, in order to “dwell” in new languages, we must make a special effort, even a humble one, expressing our consideration for today’s man and woman.

As Vatican dicasteries, what was your approach when you met the bloggers?

When the Blog Meet was announced there were mostly positive comments, although critical ones were not lacking, some even well-expressed, others more emotional. At the opening of the meeting I immediately wanted to clarify that we were there to listen, not only to Catholic bloggers, since the meeting was open to all. We wanted to understand, to hear the needs, hopes, aspirations, fears and problems of this community. For example, it is a well-known fact that new social networks now attract greater interest than blogs. We saw that our meeting was virtually accompanied by a second, live “virtual” meeting on Twitter. But these new, even faster realities are also essential areas for getting to know people’s feelings and their state of mind, and we do not want to ignore them.

After this initial step, will there be other meetings?

I think so, but not like this one. We should try to find another formula, and I think that the bloggers themselves could help us to identify one, telling us what would be of interest to them, explaining to us whether or not there would be any point in meeting two offices of the Holy See again, or how these gatherings could have positive repercussions on other local realities. We could organize local gatherings or language groups. We wish to meet them again and to listen to one another. I believe that the Church today must enter into respectful “dialogue with the contemporary world”. We need to

understand one another, listen to one another. We as the Holy See want to be authentic, but also respectful and capable of listening patiently.

Fabio Colagrande