

Reflexivity and Discourse Analysis: A Theolinguistic Analysis of the Vatican's Pastoral Teaching on Social Communications

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"As in the Book of Acts, the development of the church, and consequently of the discourse within which it is associated, is messy" (Noel Heather, "Religious Language and Critical Discourse Analysis: Ideology and Identity in Christian Discourse Today," *Religions and Discourse*, Vol 5. [New York: Peter Lang, 2000], 279).

Introduction

The theolinguistic question that discourse analysis attempts to answer is the following: what is going on when language is used? With regards to religious language the question is: what's going on when language is used in a religious context? This question will be kept in mind during my analysis of the authoritative Roman Catholic document on mass media, *Aetatis Novae*, published in 1992 by Archbishop John Foley, the President of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Social Communications. At the same time, attention will be given in this article to the Roman Catholic Church's transition from a nineteenth-century monarchical institution to a cybernetic, religious community that addresses the social concerns of the modern world. As the Roman Catholic Church's leadership critically engages the important topic of communications technology, the Church's own organizational structure has begun to transform from a closed society into an open society.

Aetatis Novae offers a re-examination of two ecclesiastical documents prepared earlier, namely, the Second Vatican Council's decree, *Inter Mirifica* (1963), and the pastoral instruction prepared by the Pontifical Commission for Social Communications in 1972, which is entitled, *Communio et Progressio*. My goal is to theolinguistically document the evolution of religious language on communications and the mass media from the Vatican's perspective between 1963 and 1992. Which

elements from the first two documents remain valid in *Aetatis Novae*, and thus express a continuity in the doctrine on language—not just the doctrinal language used? What are the new elements put forward in *Aetatis Novae*? Do these changes imply a negation—or at least corrections—of the previous discourse on language? How does *Aetatis Novae* facilitate—or on the contrary, blur and confuse—the discussion on the proper relevance and meaning of mass media for the Roman Catholic Church?

The following presentation offers a consideration of some of the conditions necessary for a meaningful study of these questions put forward in a specific Christian discourse (Roman-Catholic discourse) by its central representative institution: the Vatican. Identifying some of these conditions might shed light on the more general situation of religious language today.

Before we proceed to my examination of some aspects pertaining to reflexivity put forward by discourse analysis and a comparative analysis of the issues and perspectives on the mass media and communications put forward in the three Vatican documents to be analyzed, I want to provide some basic information on the historical background of *Aetatis Novae*, a period of almost thirty years (1963–1992).

The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) was the first expression of a time for renewal in the Roman Catholic Church. It was not by itself the start of a renewal, but, rather, it was the first official and public acknowledgment of a renewal deemed to continue after the council itself. The expression of such renewal and its implementation do pertain also to religious language, and theological language in particular, as an issue whose relevance is not just a marginal concern. And yet, does theological language as discussed in *Aetatis Novae* have the central relevance it deserves? The following analysis tries to put flesh on the bones of intuitions pertaining to central issues in the Vatican's own contemporary outlook, and to sketch the social-linguistic grammar used in *Aetatis Novae*.

Historical Background

The Vatican II decree *Inter Mirifica* was voted at the end of the second council session on December 4, 1963, immediately after the vote for the constitution on liturgy. *Inter Mirifica's* preparation and discussion was a compromise between two tendencies: first, not to waste time about such a topic, but, second, not to ignore, nor to deny the significance

of social communications and its role in the Church's pastoral work. Thus, it came of as no surprise that the decree was regarded as insufficient, satisfying nobody at the Council, despite the fact that it was approved (1960 yes votes, with 164 no votes, and 27 abstentions).

The primary architects of the Vatican II document on media were Msgr. Martin J. O'Connor, leader of the Secretariat for Communications Media and a past chairman, appointed by Pope Pius XII, of the Pontifical Commission for Motion Pictures, Radio, and Television, for fourteen years prior to Vatican II; A. Galletto, secretary to O'Connor for both agencies; and Cardinal F. Cento, President of the Commission for Laity and Communications Media. Commentators agreed that the major weakness of the decree was mainly due to the council's agenda: the decree was discussed and voted before the council's teaching on the Church and on the relation of the Church to the world, and it could therefore not take that teaching into account. Critics complained that *Inter Mirifica* was typically 'pre-conciliar' in character and 'out of touch' with the scholarly debates on communications and the mass media that took place at the beginning of the 1960s. In sum, Vatican II's decree on mass media is viewed as having neither the quality of the other council texts, nor as having the academy's general understanding of communications and mass media available at the time of its promulgation. The pastoral decree acknowledges this explicitly: at the beginning of the conclusion (article 23) it asks for a pastoral instruction to be worked out by an extended secretariate for social communications (article 19). The latter was implemented by Pope Paul VI in *Motu proprio In Fructibus multis* from April 2, 1964.

More precisely, there are three particular things that are missing in the Vatican II decree on mass media. First, a reflection on the role of word and image in the development of the intellectual and spiritual dimension of human reality. Second, an analysis of the important relation between information and the nature and relevance of communications. Third, and most importantly, the central relevance of the right of information also within the Church, and the nature and meaning of public opinion in the Church. Pope Pius XII defended the positive value of public opinion, since it belongs naturally to society, and he argued that something essential to the Church's life would be missed if it were absent. Also, Pius XII took an interest in exploring the implications of new technology, such as radio, for those inside and outside the Church. Ahead of his time, this astute Pontiff had an appreciation of the benefits and potential dangers of communication

technology. He initiated the Church's interest in dialogue on the topic of communications with scientists and engineers.

The text on media issued in 1963 by the bishops at Vatican II was a first attempt in need of refining. Thus, it came as no surprise when in 1972 a second document, entitled *Communio et Progressio*, was issued on the same topic, followed some twenty years later (1992) by a third document, *Aetatis Novae*. Together, these three documents have a distinct normative character and should be considered as the foundation for the Roman Catholic Church's pastoral teaching on the subject of social communication. The third and most recent of the texts, *Aetatis Novae*, will be taken as the primary source of information and analysis in the following discussion of this very important theological and philosophical issue.

Development of Teaching

Now, I will trace the historical growth of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications and look at the three documents and their respective approaches to mass media and communications. First, I will refer to *Communio et Progressio*, the Catholic Church's longest and most detailed treatment of mass media and communications. This text was approved by the first president of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, A. Deskur, an important figure who had then served under Cardinal Cento, as the secretary for the planning committee on 'communications media' at Vatican II. *Communio et Progressio* develops many of the issues posed in *Inter Mirifica* and introduces a number of others, particularly with reference to the Church itself. Like *Inter Mirifica*, it addresses all people of good will as well as Catholics. The communications specialists who prepared the document planned it as a careful exposition of the Church's position on communication, with a two-fold grounding. First, in a doctrinal discussion of a Christian view of communication, and second, in a formal analysis of the role of communication in human society (Soukup 1993, 72).

In *Communio et Progressio*'s doctrinal section, the document lays out the groundwork for a theological approach to mass media, finding in the doctrines of Trinity, creation, and incarnation a basis for a distinctly Christian view of communications. From its thematic statement that communication exists to serve the unity and advancement of people living in society, it develops a strong claim for freedom of public opinion; it establishes the right to be informed and inform—

including freedom of speech, access to the means of communication, and the human right to communicate. It encourages educational and cultural uses of mass communications, justifying the autonomy of artistic expression while noting that artists face moral problems when they portray evil. This document also offers some basic guidelines for advertising.

Communio et Progressio echoes *Inter Mirifica's* call for education and training for both producers and recipients of communication. It grounds its appeal in the need to develop human qualities, to serve others, to strive for justice, and to become better members of society. The pastoral instruction also stresses the issue of dialogue as fundamentally important to society—it asks that both producers and recipients actively seek to increase dialogue with each other and within society. Finally, *Communio et Progressio* asks for cooperation. In one of its few appeals to civil authority, the document calls for cooperation between citizens and governments, noting that government has a positive role—not to censor but to guarantee free speech, free expression of communicative initiatives, and free exercise of religion. The document urges national governments to work together for communication and development, particularly in emerging nations (Soukup 1993, 73).

When it turns its attention specifically to the Christian Church, *Communio et Progressio* raises a number of new issues and gives detail to some ones raised earlier by *Inter Mirifica*. Most importantly, the document applies its conclusions regarding public opinion and dialogue to the Church itself. The committee of authors realized that communication and dialogue are essential to strengthening the bonds of union in the Church. The text asks ecclesial officials to foster public opinion within the Church, but cautions that doctrine should not be confused with opinion. At the regional and local level of the Church, dioceses and their parishes are asked to provide pastoral care for communication professionals, cooperation in reporting news about the Vatican, theological reflection on social communication, media education and literacy assistance, and communication programs as part of Catholicism's contribution to the common good of society.

Finally, *Communio et Progressio* invites the Christian Church, both local and universal, to make greater use of the electronic media in evangelization and education, paying particular attention to quality. Catholics working in each sector of the communications industry—the printed word, the cinema, radio and television, and the theatre—receive words of support and advice. The document concludes with a very

practical section addressing the needs for equipment, trained personnel, and professional organizations for Roman Catholic communication (Soukup 1993, 74).

The third text I will examine was the most recent of the three pastoral instructions prepared by the Pontifical Council for Social Communications. The Vatican issued *Aetatis Novae* in 1992 to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of *Communio et Progressio*. This document reiterates many of the themes already summarized. It asks the Church to apply the corpus of conciliar and post-conciliar documents to 'new and emerging realities'. Compared to the earlier two documents, *Aetatis Novae* seems narrower in scope, on the one hand addressing the Church or church communicators, and, on the other, failing adequately to ground its claims or fully describe the changed context of social communication (on which it bases its recommendations). It does deal with matters of some importance: the economic domination of the international communication industry by transnational corporations, the effects of the communication industry on local cultures, the defense of the human right to communicate, and the Church's own ministry to form and offer pastoral care to all communicators. One new element is the Vatican's insistence on the urgency of pastoral planning for communication in each diocese or region. Indeed, *Aetatis Novae* goes so far as to include a lengthy appendix outlining such a pastoral plan (Eilers 1993, 120).

The 1992 document is signed and authorized by president John Foley of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications and the Council's secretary, Pierfranco Pastore. Unlike the earlier document *Communio et Progressio*, *Aetatis Novae* does not carry a special note of approval by the Pontiff. Neither is the text as elaborate as the 1972 document prepared under the guidance of the Council's past president, A. Deskur. Many things from the 1992 text seem to be repetitions or are quotations from already existing documents. Also with *Aetatis Novae* the authors do not pretend to say the final word on a complex, fluid, rapidly changing situation, but simply wish to provide a working tool, and a measure of encouragement, to those confronting the pastoral implications of 'revolutionary technological changes' (Soukup 1993, 74-75).

Against the strong mass media orientation of former ecclesial documents, *Aetatis Novae* affirms that these mass media 'by no means detract from the importance of alternative media which are open to people's involvement and allow them to be active in production

and even in designing the process of social communications itself'. This pastoral instruction calls the Church to 'take steps to preserve and promote folk media and other traditional forms of expression, recognizing that in particular societies these can be more effective than newer media in spreading the gospel'. Only *Communio et Progressio* had mentioned the traditional folk arts which could be preserved and spread through modern media. Here, *Aetatis Novae* seems to go a step further in recognizing all means of communication for human society (Eilers 1993, 120).

It should be noted that less preparation went into the 1992 document. In this regard, it is similar to the first document, *Inter Mirifica*, issued at Vatican II. The concrete development of *Aetatis Novae* began with a meeting of invited experts to Nemi near Rome in February 1989. In contrast, the 1972 document *Communio et Progressio* required very elaborate preparation over a period of eight years, between 1964 and 1971. *Communio et Progressio* is the fruit of a long process of international cooperation from a working group of seven bishops from different continents, as well as presidents of three international catholic organizations of press, radio, and television. This document is widely regarded as the *magna carta* of Christian communication and a document with the most concrete, positive, professional approach to mass media and Church. The Vatican recognized that this text deserved re-appraisal twenty years later in 1992 (Eilers 1993, 121).

Aetatis Novae has successfully stimulated further pastoral teaching by the Pontifical Council for Social Communications. Under the leadership of John Foley, this Curial agency produced four subsequent texts. On February 22, 1997, the Pontifical Council for Social Communications published "Ethics in Advertising." Then, Foley's group issued "Ethics in Communications" on June 2, 2000. Two years later, on February 28, 2002, two more texts were issued, "The Church and the Internet" and "Ethics in Internet." Foley himself authored an ecclesial statement for the fiftieth anniversary of the World Federation of Advertisers on October 8, 2003. All of these documents summarize recent developments in communications technology and outline the Church's concerns and opportunities regarding its use. Foley's goal has been to stimulate discussion within the Catholic Church about communications' power and potential for promoting the common good. In March, 2004 Foley asked the members of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Social Communications to begin to reflect upon the most significant events in the world of social communications

during the past forty years. He also instructed the members to express a 'dream statement' that they would like to see realized in the next ten years. Foley hoped that these reflections would provide basic documentation for a future text to be published for the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council's issuing of the pastoral decree, *Inter Mirifica*.

Reflexivity

At this point, I want to provide an examination of some aspects pertaining to reflexivity put forward by discourse analysis. In linguistics, the term reflexivity refers to the property of language by which it can be used to talk about language itself. It is the means by which critical reflection upon the Church teaching is possible. I will begin this meta-linguistic analysis by examining cognitive features embedded in *Aetatis Novae*.

Cognitive Features

What is the point of departure of *Aetatis Novae* when discourse analysis perspectives are being referred to? What is the philosophical-cultural infrastructure used in *Aetatis Novae* in order to situate both religious discourse and the mass media? What kind of background knowledge structures that would allow us to make sense of *Aetatis Novae* are implied or pre-supposed in its discourse? The Church's identity as a teacher is grounded in Jesus's metaphor of the good shepherd. In pastoral teaching, the Church leaders gather together, guide, and lead their flock. The genealogical excavation of pastoral discourse is the product of Michel Foucault's study of the art of government. Foucault situated the Church's pastoral discourse from a historical perspective within the evolution of governmentability or statecraft in the West.

In the early Church, priestly power required a particular type of knowledge, knowledge of the individual, their needs, actions, and conduct, and of their soul. To achieve this knowledge Christianity appropriated and employed, albeit in a modified form, two practices, from the ancient Greeks and Romans, namely self-examination and the guidance of conscience. Foucault argued that all types of social discourse, such as pastoral teaching, are intermeshed with networks or connections of both power and knowledge, where knowledge both

constitutes and is constituted as an effect of power. “Truth effects” are also created within pastoral discourse, or in other words, doctrine arises from the Church’s own formation of discursive procedures for the production, regulation, and diffusion of pastoral statements. Thus, genealogy helps us to understand what is and what is not Christian pastoral teaching.

Foucault studied the writings of ecclesiastical authors, from the Patristic era, such as Jerome, Ambrose, Chrysostom, and Cyprian, and monastic authors such as Benedict and Cassian. In his essay entitled, “Why Study Power?: The Question of the Subject,” Foucault states that “Christianity is the only religion which has organized itself as a Church. And as such, it postulates in principle that certain individuals can, by their religious quality, serve others not as princes, magistrates, prophets, fortune-tellers, benefactors, educators, and so on, but as pastors.” Because of early Christianity’s marginal status, discursive strategies for constructing and regulating power relations seem to have been all important, as other forms of power (economic, political, military) were largely unattainable. The efficacy of such strategies resided not so much in threats of physical force, but in equally coercive threats pertaining to the individual’s access to salvation. Foucault has argued that the emergence of Christianity was marked less by a radical change in the ethical code than by the creation and dissemination of new power relations (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983, 214–215).

Foucault has termed this new form of power ‘pastoral power’ and he offers the following definition of it: “Pastoral power is a form of power whose ultimate aim is to assure individual salvation in the next world. It is not merely a form of power that commands; it must also be prepared to sacrifice itself for the life and salvation of the flock. Therefore, it is different from royal power, which demands a sacrifice from its subjects to save the throne. It is a form of power that does not look after just the whole community, but each individual in particular, during its entire life. Finally, this form of power cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people’s minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets. It implies a knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it.” Foucault explains that this form of power is “salvation oriented (as opposed to political power). It is oblativ (as opposed to the principle of sovereignty); it is individualizing (as opposed to legal power); it is co-extensive and continuous with life; it is linked with a production of truth—the truth of the individual herself” (Dreyfus and Rabinow

1983, 214–215). Foucault’s concept of “pastoral power” helps us to understand some of the cognitive features in *Aetatis Novae*.

The interpretation of an interpreting text goes along with revealing underlying issues of the latter mainly in terms of pastoral expectations. What is considered to be a natural, self-evidently valid interpretation of the mass media in *Aetatis Novae*? What is its background wallpaper? *Aetatis Novae* tries to grapple with the fact that Christians borrow their values from the culture of modernity. Media are a threat because they are a location where meaning is produced. Mass media poses a challenge to the Church’s teaching and the docility of believers. The mass media industry is assumed by the Vatican to promote democratization and secularization, two things in tension with the heritage of the Roman Church. Modern society is increasingly post-traditional, because deference to tradition—doing things just because people did them in the past—is the opposite of modern lifestyles. And thus, the media symbolize the limits of old-fashioned, Christian teaching.

Religious Authority

Next, my theolinguistic analysis will consider the religious authority in the Vatican’s pastoral instruction. How is authority claimed both by *Aetatis Novae* and for it? To answer this question, some background is useful. The first document from Vatican II, *Inter Mirifica*, was a pastoral decree and not a constitution. Conciliar constitutions are the most solemn and formal type of ecclesial document issued by an ecumenical council. Decrees too are doctrinal and pastoral statements concerning a Church matter, but they are more transitory in value. Furthermore, both *Communio et Progressio* and *Aetatis Novae* were issued by the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, a department of the Roman Curia, the Roman Catholic Church’s collective papal governing agency. The Curia represents part of the ordinary magisterium and does not enjoy infallibility, but its documents are authoritative and call for response. These are the general norms for interpreting *Aetatis Novae* in the Church (McBrien 1995, 362, 401).

The document *Aetatis Novae* acknowledges its own proper authority by referring back to Vatican II, the decree *Inter Mirifica*, and by citing the previous pastoral instruction of 1972, *Communio et Progressio*. Such references create a sense of dialogue with authority—be it scriptural or institutional. Critics accuse the Vatican of being a clerical caste system that unites its authority with a paternalist sentiment. But

this view overlooks the Catholic Church's recent efforts to become an organization capable of self-critique and conciliar discussion. How far does the document *Aetatis Novae* move towards depicting the internal struggle between various contrasting, incongruous, and even opposite interpretations within the Church concerning the legacy of Vatican II? The conciliar and post-conciliar documents on mass media constitute sites of competition among the Church's various theological factions. Intertextual discursive analysis searches for a multiplicity of voices in this teaching. In *Aetatis Novae*, it is obvious that rival discourses compete for a dominant influence in shaping the text's viewpoint.

In general, there are two different theological opinions in the Church about mass media. The more traditional or pre-Vatican II viewpoint wants the Church to control the official interpretation (as 'holder of the knowledge') of what constitutes acceptable Christian communication. The second group wants to encourage freedom and more creativity with reference to mass media. *Aetatis Novae* shifts away from the narrow, reactive approach to mass communication that characterized earlier Vatican statements. This has led in turn to an idealistic or optimistic view of the media, which sees them only in instrumental terms and not as social structure. Nonetheless, *Aetatis Novae* also acknowledges the traditionalist position, which holds that the Church's contribution resides in its ability to train the minds and hearts of people in Christian principles.

Discourse analysts employ the term "hybridity" to characterize the status of *Aetatis Novae*, which is caught between two conflicting ecclesial orientations to mass media. Ironically, the two positions are interdependent and have mutually constructed the Vatican's pastoral instruction. These factions in the Roman Church are both mutual and oppositional. Both expressions of Catholic teaching claim to be the Church's authentic viewpoint, dubbing the other as impure. The Second Vatican Council, in particular, could be regarded as an attempt by the Church hierarchy to reconcile the Gospel with the Enlightenment. Since the Council, the Church's teaching on mass media presents numerous inconsistencies, contradictions, and counter-messages because the transition period is not yet finished. According to discourse analysis, texts do create interpreting subjects who are able to negotiate or resolve contradictions interpretatively. The ideal interpreter of *Aetatis Novae* is ambivalent about the mass media. The document lacks unitary meaning and poses ideological dilemmas to the Church. It does not 'hang together' to provide Catholics with clear

indications as to how they should think and act. Perhaps, this is why few in the Church pay them any attention. More work needs to be done so that *Aetatis Novae* cues coherence and communicates its goals more effectively.

Aetatis Novae situates or re-iterates the existing positioning of textual consumers as complex subjects. How far is such subjective complexity discarded, evinced, or even rejected for the sake of allegedly objective unanimity to be aimed at in the understanding and experience of the mass media? Perhaps the document's ambivalence results from an uncertainty with regard to audience. At different times, *Aetatis Novae* addresses all people of good will, civil leaders, all Christians, all Catholics, and Catholics in the media. How one accepts the document's analysis or counsel may well depend on which group demands one's allegiance. Discourse analysis highlights the tension in Roman Catholic discourse between holding universality of outlook and promoting a diversity of appreciations (Soukup 1993, 77–78).

In its ambivalence, *Aetatis Novae* tends to mock or mimic the mass media. This copying is multi-layered, but much of it centers on the Church's simultaneous valuing of pluralism and universalism. Like the media, the Church wants to transmit its message to a variety of groups, and yet speak in the name of humanity. A more obvious expression of this mockery is the Church's recent fascination with discourses of de-sexualized bureaucratization and apparent democratization. In likening the Church to the public sphere, *Aetatis Novae* adopts the rhetoric of human rights, freedom, democratic communication, and participatory decision-making. In short, there is an underlying theme that Church authority should become like the public sphere.

Marketing Culture

A third aspect of reflexivity uncovered by theolinguistic analysis is the influence of the marketing culture on the language in *Aetatis Novae*. From a socio-linguistic angle, there is evidence that Vatican teaching is being influenced by consumerism. Today's 'pick and mix' mentality—part tell/part sell—is the linguistic repertoire at the heart of contemporary consumerist construction of discourse. It is a new guise of the agent/patient pattern of behaviour, the latter being the goal of action for the former. Consequently, Vatican teaching tends to posit the believer as a consumer, shopping for a religious self.

It is well known that today's capitalist, marketing culture has colonized a good deal of Christian discourse. The success mentality is the off-shoot of widespread advertising rhetoric that regards the addressee of religious discourse as a worshipper-consumer. The believer is the one-who-chooses their religious identity from a capitalist perspective. This market consumerism encourages the Roman Catholic Church to target social majority outlooks. *Aetatis Novae* exploits ideas about ideal communication to enhance the Vatican's prestige. Within the Church, worship services, pastoral work, and devotional activity each are a brand for consumption.

Aetatis Novae's interest in media commodifies Church matters. The Church is constructed as a producer/seller of TV, radio, and computer programs. Pastoral ministry is situated within a managerial context. The Church becomes a community of production, whether of media literacy, Catholic journalism, or religious music. The Vatican is cast as a department of human resources. And the pastoral instruction's enthusiasm for media is replete with PR speak. Perhaps if we follow sociologist Jean Baudrillard's speculation, it might be argued that in today's media culture, Christian pastoral power has dissipated and become mere consumption.

With its structuralist-Marxist heritage, discourse analysis is a research methodology that provides a useful and critical service in documenting the way that all language works as a situating tool. In *Aetatis Novae*, there are instances where the Vatican itself is situated as a corporation. Its discussion of the mass media is constructed around Lockean understandings of property rights and a Smithian advocacy of capitalism's market economy. Pastoral ministry is cast as producing goods and services and Catholic social teaching is modified into a manifesto for the capitalist transformation of undeveloped countries.

Aetatis Novae's technological optimism could be viewed as a kind of manipulation. It forces worshipper-consumers into adopting roles which serve power-driven goals. The Church wants to maintain its influence in the age of hyper-capitalism and information technology. To avoid becoming a relic of the past, it adapts to the times, and encourages contemporary Roman Catholic identity to adopt the business Church frame model. Thus, the ideal reader is forced to engage the Vatican's mystification of media culture.

Aetatis Novae captures the spirit of post-conservative theology at Vatican II. Though the cybernetic Church is a progressive society, there are identifiable consumerist notions hardwired into its mindset.

It will be helpful to make reference to an article by Gregory Baum entitled “Faith and Liberation: Development Since Vatican II,” which delineated four weaknesses in the Second Vatican Council’s explicit acceptance of liberalism’s social engineering. First, Vatican II taught and affirmed that “modern industrial, technical, and developmental society is the instrument of justice and said all peoples should share in the positive benefits of modernity. However, it was the bishops and theologians from Western Europe, the United States, and Canada who most influenced this vision. They were naturally influenced by the extraordinary economic progress made in the West after World War II. In other words, the bishops of the West viewed the world through the eyes of capitalists, and not through those of the poor, the under-developed, and the oppressed. The bishops of Vatican II were not able to perceive that their own expression of Roman Catholicism was situated in the context of a consumerist culture from the post-War era” (Baum 1984, 100).

Second, Vatican II encouraged Christians to engage in social action and criticized a purely individual ethic. However, the Council did not go far enough. While this is true, what is often the case is that societal structures must be changed before people can even have a chance to change and live more authentically. This applies to mass media and communications, since monopolies of economic power and consolidation tend to restrict the free access of ideas. There is a need for structural criticisms of media power, rather than calls for censorship. Third, Baum pointed out, the bishops of Vatican II acknowledged the presence of personal sin in society, especially the neglect of the poor. However, Vatican II said not a word about social sin, that is the socio-economic and political oppression and financial deprivation caused by hegemonic institutions. Structures of mass media will need to be modified if those who are the ‘communications poor’ are to participate in society. Finally, Vatican II declared the Church to be in solidarity with the whole human family. However, Baum argued that the Church was too identified with the wealthy and the middle-class and hardly at all with those people involved in emancipatory struggles for basic human dignity and rights (1984, 100). In promoting mass media technology, the Church is also promoting capitalist development and free trade. Thus, there are traces of an uncritical post-conservative theology from the Vatican II document, *Inter Mirifica*, which influenced and shaped the sociolect of *Aetatis Novae*.

Argumentation

The fourth reflexive aspect advanced by theolinguistics refers to claiming, proving, and showing as alternative patterns of argumentation concerning religious discourse. The study of ecclesial teaching in the cybernetic era calls for fresh perspective. Can the Vatican transform its closed, monarchical identity into an open, cybernetic, religious community that is part of modernity? As a literary genre, ecclesial documents, such as the Vatican's pastoral instruction on social communications, broadly take an authoritative or provocative approach, or even combine these tactics. *Aetatis Novae* tends to mix analytic and didactic approaches, thus creating a confusing reading experience. Discourse analysis provides a shift of the traditional "*lex credendi/lex orandi*" outlook into propositional and emotional truth as complementary aspects of religious discourse. How does *Aetatis Novae* situate, understand, and fulfill such complementarity? Does it claim more than it proves? Or does it rather show above and beyond any claiming and proving? Is such deictics or indexicality (showing) a new genre of theological argumentation attuned to communication today?

My theolinguistic analysis indicates that *Aetatis Novae* fosters a discourse-fashioned view of both religious doctrine and practice. It takes into account the alteration of climate brought about by the mass media in the connection between thought, word, and deed. The Vatican document claims that a pastoral plan for social communications should include the following elements. First, a statement of vision which identifies communication strategies for all Church ministries and responds to contemporary issues and conditions. Second, an inventory or assessment which describes the mass media environment in the territory under consideration, including audiences, public and commercial media producers and directors, financial and technical resources, delivery systems, ecumenical and educational resources, and Catholic media organizations and communications personnel, including those of religious communities.

Here, *Aetatis Novae* is trying to give expression to the event of Jesus, who the document explicitly refers to as 'the perfect communicator'. The pastoral instruction ponders how Christians should adhere to a tradition while recognizing the newness of every step forward. *Aetatis Novae's* pastoral plan infers that such a question is primarily a matter of lived experience, not theoretical construct. The call to follow has no

objective statement, but is only embodied in the response, which is always different from the call. *Aetatis Novae* shows us that in the media age, the call to follow is therefore an evanescent event. This awareness is the beginning of a language without power or a fable (Ward 2000, 211–213).

The cultural theorist Michel de Certeau discussed the linguistic instability and discursive risk of Christian language in a 1971 lecture at St. Louis University, “The Inaugurating Rupture.” This talk describes de Certeau’s attempt to grasp the situation of Christianity in modernity and to rethink Christian theology in light of that situation. The fissure and fragmentation of theological discourse in modernity is far advanced. In his own historiographical work de Certeau examined changes in the Christian belief structure. In media culture, the Church has begun to re-formulate its linguistic practices. The linguistic structure used to frame the proclamation of religious information, as in the case of evangelism, is different from what we commonly call a message (Ward 1997, 137).

Christianity is a relationship to a past event, the event of Jesus, to which it must seek to be faithful, while at the same time being irreducibly and unavoidably different. Jesus cannot be objectified in knowledge, but can only be registered in his effects upon various Christian communities which issue from him. As such, he is known as the unknown. The form of Jesus’ death and resurrection is reproduced with different content in every Christian experience. There is a growing awareness that in Vatican teaching there is a dialectic relation between manifestation and effacement. This is called by de Certeau, an “inter-locution.” Especially in the media age, Evangelism cannot be identified with any particular practice, institution, experience, or concept. This inter-locution haunts the gaps between a multiplicity of practices and discourses which neither preserve nor repeat the event of Jesus (Ward 1997, 137–138).

Christianity is clearly not thinkable today in the same way in which it was thinkable in the past; it must always be thought differently, yet in such a way that it perpetually repeats the difference of the founding event. One is faithful to the event of Jesus precisely in accepting the modern risk of being Christian differently. In permitting new spaces, Christianity is enacted differently from the past, but also in a heterogeneous plurality in the present. In *Aetatis Novae*, the Vatican is coming to terms with its own limitations and trying to open itself to the Other, Jesus. This acknowledgement of limitations means

that it has begun to recognize that there are other spaces which open to encounter with the other and which Christian discourse cannot name or position. Michel de Certeau stresses that the inter-locution of Christian experience is not primarily a saying but a doing, by which the boundaries which necessarily delimit Christianity are perpetually transgressed (Ward 1997, 139–139).

In *Aetatis Novae*, there is an understanding that Christianity is both locution marking out boundaries and inter-locution slipping through the cracks in the walls. Michel de Certeau noted that Christian action has a specific logic, a double negation, of neither the one, nor the other. It is the logic of a Christianity which is neither without the event of Jesus nor the same as that event. In Christian belief structure there is the logic of risk, which must be taken precisely out of fidelity to others and without which Christianity can only be a museum or a cemetery (Ward 1997, 139). As Marshall McLuhan once hinted, mass media have become a metaphor for the Cosmic Christ in the modern world.

In *Aetatis Novae*, the Roman Catholic Church leadership has begun to acknowledge that its practices are no longer tied to a determinable vocabulary of faith, nor are they tied to an institutional Christian place. This move to abandoning its institutions and distinct language is risky, and in it Christian faith discovers its own weakness. Modernity and its information technology endanger the traditions of Catholicism. Somewhat like de Certeau, the pastoral instruction *Aetatis Novae* explores the dynamism to be found between continuity and rupture in Christian discourse. The document points toward a cybernetic ecclesiology, in which information-based experience shapes pastoral teaching for believers living in a media culture. This is the praxis of faith in the modern world where God is to be found in humanity's collectivization and personalization, or in the language of Teilhard de Chardin, humanity's 'planetization' through the cosmic evolution of the 'noosphere'.

Conclusion

In this essay, hopefully, I have shown something of the value of discourse analysis for religiously-minded people. I have provided a historical overview and comparative analysis of thirty years of Vatican teaching on the subject of social communications. I have examined both *Inter Mirifica* and *Communio et Progressio* through the interpretative lens of the 1992 pastoral text, *Aetatis Novae*. In general, I have traced how the

Catholic Church is moving away from its past identity as a monarchical, closed institution and towards a new identity as a cybernetic, open society. Also, I have examined some aspects pertaining to reflexivity put forward by discourse analysis. In particular, I have looked at the cognitive features of the pastoral discourse found in *Aetatis Novae*, as well as its construction of authority, its colonization by the marketing culture of capitalism, and its discursive mode of argumentation, with respect to doctrine's claiming, proving, and showing. It is clear that the Vatican is working to devise an ecclesiological model for both opening and closing so that the Church adapts to the information society without losing its identity.

According to David Tracy, the "new hermeneutics" of discourse analysis pivots scholarship away from historical context and towards social location (133). Understandably, the research methodology of discourse analysis is sometimes accused of being large and rather messy, for it cannot bring to analysis the precision of approaches that isolate one facet of religious communication from others. It is a premise of discourse analysis, however, that the precision of such methods is bought at the price of misrepresenting the complexity of religious communication. The study of religious language must take social location into account, because religious language is always in context, and there are no acts of religious communications without participants, situation, and substance. By refusing to ignore social context, discourse analysis embarks on a journey with no destination. Yet this is a necessary condition of the subject matter. Discourse, especially religious discourse, always holds out more to be analyzed, more to be said (Cook 1992, 2). It would be self-deceptive to believe that one could exhaust a religious discourse type, such as the Vatican's teaching on mass media, and present an answer to all the problems that it poses.

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