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Prelate: "Present to society the strength of the truth"

Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz gave the closing address at the conference for over 400 Church communicators held at the Pontifical University of Santa Croce in Rome, from 17-19 April.

04/20/2018

Dialogue, Respect and Freedom of Expression in the Public Arena was the title of a three-day seminar, with

over 400 communication professionals from the dioceses and other Church institutions taking part. The *11th Professional Seminar for Church Communication Offices* was held at the Pontifical University of Santa Croce in Rome, from 17-19 April.

The danger of “fake news,” the need to respect the reputation of other people, the effort to carry out an open dialogue with those who think differently than oneself were some of the topics discussed in the various sessions. Those sharing their experiences included journalists from the *New York Times*, EWTN, Itar-Tass and Radio France, as well as the directors of communication from the Bishops Conferences of France and Czechoslovakia and from the archdiocese of Mexico City.

Photo Gallery

Professor Richard John, from Columbia Journalism School in New York, spoke about the need to “rediscover the value of freedom of expression.” And Professor Margaret Sommerville, from the department of bioethics at the University of Notre Dame Australia, highlighted some ethical values dialogue requires.

Participants also had an opportunity to visit the Holy See's Dicastery for Communication, where Monsignor Lucio Ruiz brought them up to date on the reforms taking place there.

Below is the closing address given by Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz:

I want to thank you for the opportunity to close this seminar which every two years brings to this university professional men and women from all over the world who carry out communication tasks in the Church. I am happy to accept this invitation, since it gives me an

opportunity to thank you for your work in the service of the Church and society and encourage you to continue to carry it out with generosity.

Regarding the three main topics of this year's seminar (dialogue, respect and freedom of expression), I would like to focus on two ideas found in the quote from Pope Francis that was used in opening this conference: *We need to resolve our differences through forms of dialogue which help us grow in understanding and mutual respect. A culture of encounter demands that we be ready not only to give, but also to receive.*^[1]

In first place, what does it mean to *grow in understanding and mutual respect* in the sphere of communicating information.

Perhaps above all it means realizing that every form of communication involves specific persons with

names: the person who is communicating, the persons about whom one is communicating, and the persons being addressed.

Understanding begins when we strive to see specific people (and not an anonymous “crowd”) at the heart of each act of communication, even though these people are not physically present. We don’t see them, but they are there, with all their dignity, especially when they are more vulnerable. Every person is important, above all because Christ has died and risen for that person.

Especially in recent years, when false news has appeared on a massive scale, *understanding and mutual respect* entails a deep renewal of the news profession, a deeper grasp of its dimension of service to each woman and man, since a well-informed person is a freer and more responsible person, and therefore

better able to carry out acts of solidarity in society.

Moreover, those who respect other people, the truth of things and the essence of their profession become more “respectable,” better interlocutors in public debates. And in striving to understand others, to grasp their point of view, we discover aspects of the truth we hadn’t seen before. Our suggestions are better aimed and we become more “understandable” to others. If, in contrast, the work of communication ignores others’ questions and perplexities, monologue supplants dialogue.

In second place, in this interplay of giving and receiving to which the Pope refers, it is important to rediscover that, as Church communicators, you have the opportunity, intrinsic to your religious freedom, to present to

society “the strength of the truth” found in the Catholic faith (*Dignitatis Humanae*, no. 1).

The possibility of illuminating human realities with the spirit of the Gospel is one of the fundamental rights of religious freedom. Men and women today continue to thirst for the truth and seek the deeper meaning of their lives. With your work and friendship you can be instruments in the marvelous task of “assisting one another in the quest for truth” (*Dignitatis Humanae*, no. 3).

Human dignity requires that the person's capacity for self-determination towards the truth be protected, being neither impeded nor forced. Therefore the foundation of the right to religious freedom, as understood by the Church's Magisterium, is the same as that of other civil rights (of the press, of

personal opinions). And this foundation is nothing other than our human dignity.

Finally, allow me a reflection related to the speed that sometimes affects the work of communication, the immediacy with which you often have to make important decisions. This is the need we all have of cultivating wide interior spaces filled with serenity in order to make our work fruitful.

Serenity enables us to give depth to our work, to discover its dimension of eternity and to rest in God. Saint Josemaria, whose spirit lies behind the creation of this university, made a specific suggestion that is apt for our daily life: “Find repose in the reality of being a child of God. God is a Father who is full of tenderness, of infinite love. Call him ‘Father’ many times a day and tell him—alone, in your heart—that you love him, that

you adore him, that you feel proud and strong because you are his child.”[2]

The meaning and strength we find in realizing we are children of God—more evident in this Easter season—will lead us to be serene in our work, to spread peace and hope and unite faith with professionalism.

A serene communicator will find ways to infuse Christian meaning into the inevitably rapid flow of public opinion.

Serenity will give us a broad vision of reality and help us to transmit the faith that was entrusted to the Church twenty centuries ago in an original, fresh and attractive way. And to spread understanding and respect for everyone.

Thank you.

[1] Message of Pope Francis for the 48th World Communications Day, 1 June 2014.

[2] Saint Josemaria, *Friends of God*, no. 150.

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