

JOURNALISM'S "THIRD STAGE"



Two major events have tested contemporary journalism, but have we taken the time to reflect on what happened? *Pandemic* and *war* are the magnets that, because of their enormous reach, have attracted news coverage, renewed languages and distorted every televised "liturgy."

Another element—the digital one—has corroded the usual "modes" of televised journalistic reporting: deserted studios replaced by webcam connections from the studio and even from one's car; concerts with no audiences; debates with experts and their polar opposites; news broadcasts (or programs) conducted from the presenter's home. *Smart working* even for journalists.

There are a lot of questions and not enough answers. Let's go back to what happened in late 2019 and early 2020. An invisible enemy impacted every social reality like an earthquake, a tremor that did not erase social inequalities but ended up accentuating them. Television—by definition a screen of "images"—found itself recounting the consequences of a nameless, faceless virus that was subsequently given the acronym *COVID-19* and the image of a crown of spikes to represent it.

The journalistic world's reliance on experts, time pressure with regard to breaking news about the progress of the pandemic, reports on advances in science and the availability of vaccines, and the economic and social consequences of the covid virus were all limitations that challenged the status won by television in its early days as a medium that could provide all the answers.

The second event concerns the explosion of a new war in Europe, namely, the Russian invasion of Ukraine. If, some thirty years ago,

the Gulf War was the first to be transmitted "live" on TV and is often remembered by the static picture of a night visor with the sky behind it streaked by luminous bombardments, today it is even more appropriate to reflect on how "war in the media" and "the media in war" function.

Social media have been used as alternative and direct channels of information. Unfortunately, they also circulate alternative narratives and, through the use of *likes* and sharing, magnify the spread of fake news.

But how has the world of journalism changed in the face of tests like these? Let me offer my perspective. After journalism's "first stage" (producing a news report) and its second one (airing and publication of the news) I want to suggest that we have now reached a "third stage" of information, namely: one in which we listen to, compare ideas and reflect on them, thus initiating a circular process that incorporates these considerations into the production of new services. Looking at the Ukraine conflict from the outside, it can be viewed as a laboratory affected by languages and experiences, rather than one that takes encounter and listening as its starting point, as Pope Francis proposes in his Message for WCD 2022.

At a time in history in which the number of digital screens has surpassed television screens, the digital world has been caught up in this war as well. But in the face of the painful consequences of the Ukraine conflict, we must take into consideration the power that is bestowed on or appropriated to varying degrees by individual news outlets.

Having fled across the border, Ukrainian refugees were able to remain in touch with those they left behind through the Web, keeping them informed about what was happening as they took their first steps in search of a new future.

Re-reading Pope Francis' Message today, we see the Holy Father's desire to apply the search for listening "with the ear of the heart" to events that have perhaps changed, or at least reaffirmed, the art of journalism, which in turn is challenged by the demand for continuous updating by the digital world seeking a home in this new "third stage."

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