

Nov 04, 2016 by *Alvin Snyder*

Key to Vatican public diplomacy: the Pope's Executive Producer ^[1]

Business was brisk this month at the annual MIP international TV program festival in Cannes, France - the best of such fests.

MIP-TV is the global TV marketplace where the rage last week was "made-for-mobile" content for picture cell phones, so that kids can watch shows like Bob the Builder and Thomas the Tank Engine while strapped in their car seats or walking along the sidewalk.

The big new global pay-TV drama series about the war in Iraq, "Over There," was rolled out, and TV digital markets showing rapid, surprising growth were in Eastern Europe and Asia.

But one movie was greeted with special curiosity: "The Jeweler's Shop," a film starring Burt Lancaster set in pre-World War II Poland. The reason: the movie was based on a 1960 novel by Andrzej Jaswien, a pseudonym used by Karol Wojtyla, whom we know as Pope John Paul II.

This is a first: a Pope who wrote for Hollywood. And whose movie was screened this month at Cannes!

With such a background in media and a charismatic star in his public appearances, where would this Pope find just the right person within the Catholic Church to be his communications director, to expand the Vatican's international TV reach?

The person he selected was an American, John Patrick Foley, born in 1935 and raised in Philadelphia, with a master's degree in journalism, and a PhD, writer and editor of Catholic publications, and ordained an Archbishop in 1984.

Archbishop John Patrick Foley became head of the Vatican's Pontifical Council of Social Communications in 1984, a position he still holds today. He has been cited often for his work in enlivening the Vatican's media, especially television, through which the Pope had so successfully communicated with people of all lands for decades.

"He realizes the power of television," Archbishop Foley told U.S. News and World Report in 1994. "He has a marvelous communications personality, he has a marvelous face and a beautiful rich voice, and he has that gift for languages and that knowledge of the importance of the symbolic gesture, which is very good from a media point of view."

Growing up in Philadelphia, John Patrick Foley would have seen another example of a master communicator at work on local television, communicators who possessed many of those skills that he would later find in Pope John Paul. That's because few within range of Philly TV stations in the 1950s did not watch either John Facenda or Dick Clark. As most did then, I watched them both, from the New Jersey side of the Delaware River. John Patrick Foley

almost surely did the same, from across the river in Philadelphia.

John Facenda was a news anchor on Philadelphia's WCAU-TV who attracted large and loyal audiences. He spoke individually to each viewer, or so they believed. That was no accident: A devout Roman Catholic, Facenda first sharpened his news anchoring skills on radio, where he would read while glancing up at a picture of his mother on the wall, to practice speaking to one person.

Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls, whose briefings this month became familiar to television viewers all over the world, said he believed Pope John Paul's messages similarly focused on each individual, "transmitted in an expressive variety that includes the written and spoken word and gestures (and) is always focused on putting a specific human being - man or woman - in contact with the transcendent God of Christian revelation."

Facenda later moved to television, where he dominated local news for two decades. With his deep, rich voice - Facenda was nicknamed "The Voice of God" -- he became narrator for NFL films.

"If the Last Supper had an after-dinner speaker, it would have been John Facenda," said NFL Films President Steve Sabol.

Philadelphia's other dominant TV personality in the 1950s was Dick Clark, host of "Bandstand." Clark moved to Philadelphia in 1952, after hosting a local music program in Utica, New York. Five years later, he went nationwide on the ABC-TV network, and the program was renamed "American Bandstand." It ran on ABC for more than thirty years.

Clark was clean cut, and he insisted that the high school girls who danced to popular records in the TV studio wear dresses, not slacks, and it was coat-and-tie only for the boys. The Museum of Broadcast Communications said Clark adapted to changing musical trends and "helmed the longest running broadcast program aimed at mainstream youth to air on American network broadcast television."

John Paul II also had special ties to youth. Archbishop Foley recalled the Pope was able to attract crowds of young people far exceeding those for any musical group or singers, even the Beatles. The Pope's appearance at World Youth Day in Manila was attended by an estimated ten million persons, said to be the world's record for a gathering.

"From the beginning, he tailored that message for an increasingly Third World rather than exclusively Western audience," reported Tandem News, "and he targeted the very young instead of the middle-aged Catholics."

Archbishop Foley said the Pope once asked him, "What was the most difficult television broadcast you ever did?" He responded that it was the Pope's World Youth Day Mass in Manila. When the Pope asked why, Archbishop Foley said he noted that the Pope "had been one-and-a-half hours late, because the streets were so blocked that he had to go out of the city to fly in on a helicopter."

Something else shared by Dick Clark and Pope John Paul was their interest in racial equality.

"Once Clark took over the helm of Bandstand in 1956, he insisted on racially integrating the show, since much of the music was performed by black recording artists," according to a

Museum of Broadcast Communications article. "When the show moved to the network schedule, it maintained its racially mixed image, thus providing American television broadcasting with its most visible ongoing image of ethnic diversity until the 1970s."

In 1969, Karol Cardinal Wojtyla, then Archbishop of Cracow, visited Philadelphia's St. Charles Seminary, where John Patrick Foley was a philosophy professor and worked at the diocesan newspaper. Archbishop Foley recalls that Cardinal Wojtyla "was particularly interested in African-American students for the priesthood, inquiring about how they were treated, about their experiences in their neighborhoods and their previous schools and about their views on the situation of racial justice in the United States."

Cardinal Wojtyla had an opportunity to observe the younger John Patrick Foley at work on numerous occasions abroad during the period when Foley served as a journalist and translator, and the Cardinal liked what he saw. Foley had once escaped death in a car accident, when the collision threw him into the back seat unharmed. Once on a trip to Poland, at a gathering in Cardinal Wojtyla's home, John Foley was asked to tell the story, and he did so in Latin, the only common language of those who were present.

After Cardinal Wojtyla was elected Pope, John Patrick Foley served on trips abroad as English language press secretary for the Holy See. And in 1984, John Patrick Foley, who grew up in Philadelphia watching John Facenda and Dick Clark on television, was named by Pope John Paul II as Archbishop and President of the Vatican's Pontifical communications for the Catholic Church. A member of the Roman Curia, Archbishop Foley's duties were summarized as "responsible for matters relating to the use of the media for the spreading of the Gospel."

The Archbishop also oversees the Vatican's FM radio station, called "One-O-Five Live," a radio service launched by none other than radio pioneer Guglielmo Marconi in 1931.

And Archbishop Foley has presided over the growth of the Vatican Television Center (CTV) since a year after its inception in 1983.

In addition to having covered the Pope's more than 100 trips abroad and 130 trips within Italy, each a major TV event, CTV also televises some 130 live broadcasts inside the Vatican each year. It has a worldwide distribution deal with Associated Press Television News (APTN), announced in 2003, and it co-produces programs with the Italian state television network, RAI.

CTV also reports it has the world's most extensive video archives of the Pope in the world - 4,000 hours of video recordings and over 10,000 video cassettes, used as a resource by documentary producers and for TV news coverage worldwide.

If you saw the Pope's funeral on television, you were watching CTV, which directed the worldwide TV coverage.

"One media outlet was controlling all the images broadcast around the world," according to the International Herald Tribune. "Whether it was images of cardinals praying as the pope lay in wake inside the Apostolic Palace - once an intimately private ritual - or pilgrims streaming by his open bier, every shot came from CTV."

Which brings us back to Cannes, where "John Paul II - The Untold Story," a TV documentary about Pope Paul shot by CTV and first seen on Italian television last month, was screened

last week at the MIP TV festival. Worldwide sales are hot.

And read Archbishop Foley's letters below:

May 2, 2005

Dear Mr. Snyder:

Thank you for your kind letter and article.

I knew John Facenda well, and I met Dick Clark several times -- but I never watched the program, although I had to fight my way through mobs of young people as I went into WFIL to record a weekly religious program. Dick Clark had been hired by a friend of mine, Jack Steck.

By the way, I have no authority over Vatican Radio, although I've been on a committee for it and I have broadcast on it many times.

The late Holy Father was Cardinal Wojtyla, without a "u".

May God continue to bless you and your work!

Sincerely in Christ,

*(Archbishop) John P. Foley
President
Pontifical Council for Social Communications*

May 9, 2005

Dear Mr. Snyder:

If publishing my letter is what you wish, you certainly have my permission.

By the way, I am sure you know that Philadelphia was the point of origination for many network programs during the 1950's.

WCAU-TV, Channel 10, then a CBS affiliate, had "Action in the Afternoon", a live Western from their side lot -- which moved inside into a barroom scene during inclement weather; "What in the World", an archeological program; "In the Park", a puppet program with Bill Sears; and "The Big Top", a circus program in which Ed McMahon was a clown!

WPTZ, WRCV-TV and KYW-TV followed one another on the same channel 3 as an NBC affiliate and then O&O. Network programs originating in Philadelphia were the first soap opera, "Miss Susan", with Susan Peters, and "The Nature of Things", a science program. (As a college student, I was on a weekly program called "Debate", which I think -- I hope! -- was only local -- and one of the persons I debated was now Sen. Arlen Specter. Our program at noon on Sunday followed a children's program called "Bertie the Bunyip".)

WFIL-TV, of course, had "Bandstand" with Dick Clark, and Paul Whiteman's TV Teen Club, both on ABC. It also had a religious program called "Youth of the March", which it originated

for the Dumont Network on Sunday night for TV evangelist Percy Crawford.

I am certain that there were other network originations -- but I can't remember them now.

May God bless your work!

Sincerely,

(Archbishop) John P. Foley

President

Pontifical Council for Social Communications
