



# The Holy See

---

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY  
OF THE PONTIFICAL COMMISSION  
FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS**

*Friday 20 March 1992*

*Dear Brother Bishops,  
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

1. The Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications is the happy occasion of our meeting. I gladly welcome you and thank you for putting your professional competence at the service of the Holy See. Through your dedicated efforts, this week has seen the publication of the new Pastoral Instruction on Social Communications "Aetatis Novae", which - we may be confident - is destined to ensure a more effective presence of the Church in the communications media.

The new Instruction is designed to supplement but certainly not to replace the landmark Pastoral Instruction "Communio et Progressio", published two decades ago in response to a request from the Second Vatican Council in its Decree "Inter Mirifica". "Aetatis Novae" is the outcome of lengthy preparations, beginning with a worldwide survey of Episcopal Conferences and Catholic communicators. It offers a mature and extensive reflection by the Church on problems and opportunities in the field of communications at the dawn of a new era, the end of one Millennium and the beginning of another, made all the more significant by the profound changes now taking place in the history of the world's peoples and nations.

The new Document calls upon Dioceses and Episcopal Conferences actively to support a pastoral plan for social communications. It indicates that since every work of the Church is meant to communicate the truth and the love of Jesus Christ there should not only be a pastoral plan for communications but communications should be part of every pastoral plan. In an age so strongly

marked by the communications media, it is essential for all involved in the apostolate to become accustomed to incorporating communications strategies into their pastoral planning. This new document offers guidelines for introducing the principles of "Inter Mirifica" and "Communio et Progressio" into such programmes.

2. "Aetatis Novae" is most timely in the particular situation of the world at the present moment. Profound political changes in Central and Eastern Europe have produced new opportunities for bringing the word of God to people prevented from hearing it by decades of atheistic oppression. In Western Europe there is already a long experience of Catholic presence in communications, and occasions for ecumenical and interreligious cooperation are constantly increasing. At the same time attention must be given to presenting programmes which display the genuine face of Catholic life and doctrine, while new developments in communications policies need to be carefully examined.

In Asia and Oceania, satellite technology has literally opened new windows on the world, bringing millions of human beings into contact with all that is good but also with all that is ambiguous or even harmful in the communications media. As regards Africa, the already published guidelines or "lineamenta" for the forthcoming Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa contain excellent principles for the use of the communications media in that continent, not only for a more widespread proclamation of the Gospel but also for more effective social, economic and truly human development.

Moreover, this year marks the five hundredth anniversary of the evangelization of the New World. The Christian message was the most precious gift which the early explorers and missionaries brought to the newly discovered continent, and faithful adherence to Christian principles on the part of all Catholics in the Americas would be a most appropriate way of expressing gratitude for that gift. The creative use of the media is essential not only for a deeper appreciation of the faith among those who already profess it, but also for an effective presentation and explanation of the Gospel to those who seek to understand better the beliefs of their Catholic brothers and sisters and perhaps even to accept that faith. Properly used, the communications media - in the New World and in the Old - can be powerful instruments of justice and peace. They can be employed to promote respect for the human rights of all persons - rich and poor, young and old, sick and healthy, powerful and powerless - and to remind individuals of their responsibilities to God and neighbour.

3. It is most appropriate to consider how all people, but especially the followers of Christ can be taught to be intelligent users of the media - able to distinguish the true from the false, the helpful from the harmful, the enriching from the demeaning. It is also appropriate to consider how young people can be trained to be effective workers in the media, with not only technical knowledge but also that spiritual and intellectual expertise which ensures both professional presentation and worthy content.

In my Message for this year's World Day of Social Communications I have urged Catholics to be more zealous in the use of the media for the proclamation of the Gospel. For centuries, the Church has been the patron of artists who have created masterpieces of literature, painting, sculpture and architecture in order to reflect the glory of God and to enrich the patrimony of civilization. Many of the artists who shape the ideals and values of the world today work in the communications media. The Church must understand them and encourage them, but she must also challenge them to articulate lofty ideals and present inspiring themes, capable of bringing the Christian message of liberation and hope to bear on the fears and anxieties of so many contemporary men and women, and of increasing people's awareness of the moral principles on which life must be built. It is important for media personalities to be men and women of integrity and of sound moral character - men and women worthy of the respect which is paid them and of the trust which is given them. In short, the world should be enriched by their skill and artistry, but also by their goodness.

4. These and other matters have been the subject of your reflections during these days of your Assembly and will continue to occupy you in the future. With a prayer that your work in and for the communications media will contribute to the spread of the Gospel and to the promotion of unity, justice and peace, I invoke God's abundant gifts upon you and your loved ones. With my Apostolic Blessing.