



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE PARTICIPANTS AT A CONVENTION ON THE THEME:
"IDENTITY AND MISSION OF A COMMUNICATIONS' FACULTY
IN A CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY"
ORGANIZED BY THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS***

*Clementine Hall
Friday, 23 May 2008*

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I am very pleased to address my welcome to all of you, academicians and educators of Catholic Institutions of higher culture, gathered in Rome to reflect, together with members of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, on the identity and mission of the Communications Faculty in Catholic Universities. Through you I wish to greet your colleagues, your students and all those who are part of the Faculty that you represent. A particular thanks goes to your President, Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli, for the kind words of tribute that he addressed to me. Along with him I greet the Secretaries and the Undersecretary of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications.

The diverse forms of communication - dialogue, prayer, teaching, witness, proclamation - and their different instruments - the press, electronics, the visual arts, music, voice, gestural art and contact - are all manifestations of the fundamental nature of the human person. It is communication that reveals the person, that creates authentic and community relationships, and which permits human beings to mature in knowledge, wisdom and love. However, communication is not the simple product of a pure and fortuitous chance or of our human capacity. In the light of the biblical message, it reflects, rather, our participation in the creative, communicative and unifying Trinitarian Love which is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. God has created us to be united to him and

he has given us the gift and the duty of communication, because he wants us to obtain this union, not alone, but through our knowledge, our love and our service to him and to our brothers and sisters in a communicative and loving relationship.

It is self-evident that at the heart of any serious reflection on the nature and purpose of human communications there must be an engagement with questions of truth. A communicator can attempt to inform, to educate, to entertain, to convince, to comfort; but the final worth of any communication lies in its truthfulness. In one of the earliest reflections on the nature of communication, Plato highlighted the dangers of any type of communication that seeks to promote the aims and purposes of the communicator or those by whom he or she is employed without consideration for the truth of what is communicated. No less worth recalling is Cato the Elder's sober definition of the orator; *vir bonus dicendi peritus* a good or honest man skilled in communicating. The art of communication is by its nature linked to an ethical value, to the virtues that are the foundation of morality. In the light of that definition, I encourage you, as educators, to nourish and reward that passion for truth and goodness that is always strong in the young. Help them give themselves fully to the search for truth. Teach them as well, however, that their passion for truth, which can be well served by a certain methodological scepticism, particularly in matters affecting the public interest, must not be distorted to become a relativistic cynicism in which all claims to truth and beauty are routinely rejected or ignored.

I encourage you to give more attention to academic programmes in the area of the means of social communication, in particular to the ethical dimensions of communication between people, in a period in which the phenomenon of communication is occupying an ever greater place in all social contexts. It is important that this formation is never considered as a simple technical exercise, or a mere wish to give information. Primarily it should be more like an invitation to promote the truth in information and to help our contemporaries reflect on events in order to be educators of humankind today and to build a better world. It is likewise necessary to promote justice and solidarity, and to respect in whatever circumstance the value and dignity of every person, who also has a right not to be wounded in what concerns his private life.

It would be a tragedy for the future of humanity if the new instruments of communication, which permit the sharing of knowledge and information in a more rapid and effective manner, were not made accessible to those who are already economically and socially marginalized, or if it would contribute only to increasing the gap that separates those people from the new network that is developing at the service of human socialization, of information and of understanding. On the other hand, it would be equally grave if the tendency toward globalization in the world of communications were to weaken or eliminate the traditional customs and the local cultures, particularly those which are able to strengthen family and social values: love, solidarity, and respect for life. In this context I desire to express my esteem to those religious communities who, notwithstanding the heavy financial burden or the generous human input, have opened Catholic universities in developing countries and I am pleased that many of these institutions are

represented here today. Their efforts will ensure the countries where they are present the benefits of young men and women who receive a deep professional formation, inspired by the Christian ethic which promotes education and teaching as a service to the whole community. I appreciate, in a particular way, their commitment to offer a sound education to all, independent of race, social condition or creed, which constitutes the mission of the Catholic University.

In these days you will examine together the question of the identity of a university or a Catholic school. In this regard, I would like to recall that such an identity is not simply a question of the number of Catholic students. It is above all a question of conviction: it concerns truly believing that only in the mystery of the Word made flesh does the mystery of man become clear. The consequence is that the Catholic identity lies, in the first place, in the decision to entrust oneself, intellect and will, mind and heart, to God. As experts in the theory and in the practice of communication and as educators who are forming a new generation of communicators, you have a privileged role, not only in the life of your students, but also in the mission of your local Churches and of your Pastors to make the Good News of God's love known to all peoples.

Dear friends, in confirming my appreciation for this, your interesting meeting that opens the heart to hope, I wish to assure you that I follow your precious activity with prayer and accompany it with a special Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to all those who are dear to you.

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