



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS**

Consistory Hall

Thursday, 29 October 2009

Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is with great joy that I extend to you my cordial welcome on the occasion of the Plenary Assembly of the [Pontifical Council for Social Communications](#). I would first of all like to express my gratitude to Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli, President of your Pontifical Council, for the kind words that he has addressed to me on behalf of you all. I extend my greeting to his collaborators and to you here present, thanking you for the contribution that you make to the work of the Plenary Assembly, and for the service that you render to the Church in the field of social communications.

In these days you are pausing to reflect on the new communication technologies. Even a casual observer can easily see that in our time, thanks to the most modern technologies, a true and proper revolution is underway in the field of social communications, of which the Church is becoming ever more responsibly aware. These technologies, in fact, make rapid and pervasive communication possible, with an ample sharing of ideas and opinions. They transmit information and news, making them easily accessible to all. For some time the [Pontifical Council for Social Communications](#) has followed this surprising and swift evolution of the media, making great use of the discourses within the Church's Magisterium. At this point I would like to recall in particular two Pastoral Instructions: Pope [Paul VI](#)'s *Communio et Progressio* and [John Paul II](#)'s *Aetatis Novae*. Two authoritative documents of my venerable Predecessors, who favoured and promoted a profound awareness of these matters in the Church. Furthermore, the great social changes that have occurred in the last 20 years have demanded and continue to demand an attentive analysis of the presence and the action of the Church in this field. The Servant of God [John Paul II](#) in the

Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) recalled that: "Involvement in the mass media, however, is not meant merely to strengthen the preaching of the Gospel. There is a deeper reality involved here: since the very evangelization of modern culture depends to a great extent on the influence of the media". And he added, therefore "it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate that message into the 'new culture' created by modern communications" (n. 37 c.). In fact, modern culture arises from the very existence of new modes of communication that utilize new forms of language rather than from the content, employing new technology and creating new psychological attitudes. All this constitutes a challenge for the Church called to proclaim the Gospel to men and women of the Third Millennium, maintaining the content unchanged, but rendering it comprehensible also thanks to means and methods that are in keeping with today's mentality and culture.

The means of social communication referred to as such in the Conciliar Decree *Inter Mirifica* have today assumed a potential and function that were difficult to foresee at the time. The multi-media character and the structural interactivity of each new kind of media has, in a certain sense, diminished the specificity of every single component, gradually generating a sort of global system of communication. For this reason, even in maintaining the proper, unique character of each means of communication, the world of communication's actual evolution increasingly demands discussion of one single form of communication, which brings together the diverse voices or places them in direct, reciprocal connection. Many among you, dear friends, are experts in this sector and could analyze much more professionally the various dimensions of this phenomenon, including, above all, those that are anthropological. I would like to take the opportunity to invite those who work in the Church in the field of communication and who are responsible for pastoral guidance to respond to the challenges that these new technologies pose to evangelization.

In this year's *Message for the World Day of Social Communications*, emphasizing the importance that the new technologies hold, I have encouraged those in charge of communication processes at every level to promote a culture of respect for the dignity and the value of the human person; a dialogue rooted in the sincere search for truth and for friendship not as an end in itself, but capable of developing each person's gifts in order to place them at the service of the human community. In this way the Church carries out what we could define as a "diaconate of culture" on the current "digital continent", moving forward to proclaim the Gospel, the only word that can save mankind. It is the task of the *Pontifical Council for Social Communications* to understand in-depth every element of the new media culture, beginning with the ethical aspects, and carrying out a service of orientation and of guidance in order to help the particular Churches to understand the importance of communication, which by now represents a fixed, inalienable aspect of every pastoral plan. Furthermore, it is precisely the nature of the new media that makes an action of consultation, of solidarity and of coordination possible also on a large scale and in the globalized dimension that has been assumed. This, beyond increasing the effective diffusion of the Gospel message, can sometimes prevent a useless dispersion of energy and resources. For believers, the necessary

evaluation of the new media technologies must always be sustained by a constant vision of faith, in the knowledge that, beyond the means employed, the effectiveness of the Gospel proclamation depends in the first place on the action of the Holy Spirit, who guides the Church and the journey of humanity.

Dear brothers and sisters, this year marks the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the *Filmoteca Vaticana* by my venerable Predecessor Blessed [John XXIII](#), which has collected and catalogued material filmed from 1896 up to today and which serves to illustrate the history of the Church. Moreover, the *Filmoteca Vaticana* possesses a rich cultural patrimony, which belongs to the whole of humanity. As I express my warm gratitude for what has already been accomplished, I encourage the continuation of the interesting collection work, which documents the stages of Christianity's journey through the evocative witness of images, so that this heritage may be preserved and known. To you present here I once again extend a "thank you" for the contribution that you make to the Church in such an important field as that of Social Communications, and I assure you of my prayer that the work of your Pontifical Council may continue to bear much fruit. I invoke upon each and everyone the intercession of Our Lady and I impart to all of you the Apostolic Blessing.

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