



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II FOR THE 22nd WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY

"Social Communications and the Promotion of Solidarity and Fraternity Between Peoples and Nations "

[Sunday, 15 May 1988]

Brothers and sisters,

my dear friends,

the communicators, If one day it can be truly said that "to communicate" is the same as "to fraternize", that "communication" signifies human "solidarity", will not this be the most beautiful result of "mass communications"? It is on this theme that I would propose to you that we reflect on the 22nd World Communications Day. In speaking of fraternity, I use the term in its strict meaning. It is Christ, in effect, "the first-born among many brethren (Rm. 8:29), who makes us discover in every human person, friend or even enemy, a brother or a sister. Christ who came "not to condemn the world but to save it" (cf. John 3:17), calls all humanity to unity. The Spirit of love which he gives to the world is also a Spirit of unity: St. Paul shows us the same Spirit who grants a variety of gifts, who acts in the different members of the same Body: there are "varieties of gifts... but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one" (1 Cor. 12:4-6). If I mention first the spiritual basis of fraternity and solidarity, it is because this Christian meaning is not at all unrelated to the human reality which the words primarily signify. The Church does not consider fraternity and solidarity to be values in any way reserved to itself. On the contrary, we remind ourselves always how Jesus praised the Good Samaritan who recognized a brother in the man who was wounded, in contrast to the priest and the Levite (cf. Luke 10:29-37). In like manner, the Apostle Paul invites us not to despise the gifts of others, but to rejoice in the Spirit's workings in each of our brothers (1 Cor. 12:14-30). Fraternity and solidarity are basic and urgent things: they ought to be, in our times, distinguishing marks of peoples and cultures. The joyous unveiling of their happy, friendly, helpful relationships with one another: ought this not to be the most beautiful "festival" offered by mass communications, their most successful "show", in the best sense of these terms? In this period of spectacular development in mass communications, the bonds which they weave between peoples and cultures represent the most precious and valuable support that they offer to humanity. I know, at the same time, that you communicators are aware of perverse effects as well, which threaten distortion and disfigurement to these relations between peoples and cultures. Exaltation of the self, contempt for and rejection of those who are different, can aggravate tensions and divisions. From such attitudes spring violence, mistaken directions, destruction of true communication; for they render impossible all brotherly relationship. In order that the very existence of brotherhood and human solidarity may be made possible, and still more so that their Christian dimension may be more intensely

developed, the elementary values which underlie them have to be given recognition. Permit me here to recall certain of these: respect for others, a willingness to dialogue, justice, healthy ethics in personal and community living, freedom, equality, peace in unity, promotion of the dignity of the human person, the capacity to share and to divine with others. Brotherhood and solidarity rise above all clannish and corporation spirit, all nationalism, all racism, every abuse of power, every individual fanaticism, be it cultural or religious. It is for the agents of mass communication to use the techniques and media at their disposal always with a conscientious regard for these primary values. Here I suggest only some of the possible applications:--Let the information agencies and the whole ensemble of the press demonstrate their respect for others by giving complete and balanced information;--the radiophonic diffusion of the word will the better attain its purpose in the measure in which the possibility of reciprocal exchange is offered to all;--media which are the mouthpiece of particular groups contribute to the operation of justice in giving a voice also to the voiceless;--television programmes touch on almost all aspects of life and the networks have countless possible applications and interconnections: considering their great influence, there must rest on those responsible for them an ethical imperative, obliging them to offer to persons and communities images which favour the mutual penetration of cultures, without intolerance and without violence, in the service of unity;--the possibility of personal communications by telephone, their extension by teletext, their wider and wider spread by satellite, all this suggests that we should have a care for equality among persons and facilitate access to these media to a greater number, so as to permit really meaningful exchanges;--information increasingly concerns economic or cultural activities, data banks bring together a quantity of diverse information which was unimaginable in earlier times: it is known that this could be used in such a way as to bring all sorts of pressure to bear on private community life; and the wise management of these media thus becomes a veritable precondition of peace;--to create the "shows" which sustain the various audiovisual media implies an obligation to respect the consciences of the countless "spectators" in the audiences;--advertising publicity awakens or increases desires and also creates needs: those who commission it or bring it to realization have to keep in mind the disadvantaged for whom the benefits advertised are out of reach. Whatever the exact mode by which they intervene, it is necessary that the communicators observe a code of honour, that they have a care for the sharing out of the truth among and about humankind, and that they shall contribute to a new world order of information and of communication. In the midst of the ever more concentrated and active network of social communications spanning the world, the Church binds itself simply to keep on ceaselessly recalling, as "an expert in humanity", the values which constitute the grandeur of the human being. But she is at the same time convinced that these cannot be assimilated and put into action in the concrete, if the spiritual life of the human being is forgotten. For Christians, the revelation of God in Christ is an illumination on man and woman, on humanity itself. Faith in the message of salvation constitutes the most deeply felt motivation for serving the human race. The gifts of the Spirit engage us in the service of others in a brotherly solidarity. The question may be asked of us: are we not perhaps too trusting in our openness to this kind of thinking? Do the tendencies which are apparent in the field of mass communication really permit us to entertain such hopes? To hearts which are troubled by the risks of the new technologies of communication, I would reply: "Fear not"! Far from ignoring the reality in which we live, we read it more profoundly. We distinguish, in the Light of faith, the authentic signs of the times. The Church, full of care for man and woman, is aware of the deep aspiration of the human race for fraternity and solidarity--an inspiration often disowned or disfigured, but indestructible because it is sculpted in the human heart by the same God who has created in it the need for communication and the capacity to develop it on a planetary scale. On the threshold of the third millennium, the Church reminds men and women that fraternity and solidarity cannot be regarded merely as conditions for survival; they are essentials of their vocation, a vocation which the exercise of social communication permits them to realize freely. Permit me then to say to you all, especially in this Marian Year "Do not be afraid!" Was not Mary herself frightened

at the announcement which contained the sign of salvation offered to the whole of humanity?"Blessed is she who believed", as Elizabeth testified (Lk. 1:45). It is thanks to her faith that the Virgin Mary accepts God's plan, enters into the mystery of trinitarian communion, and, becoming the Mother of Christ, inaugurates in history a new fraternity. Blessed are those who believe, those whom the faith liberates from fear and opens to hope and leads to the construction of a world where, in fraternity and solidarity, there is place for the communication of joy! Animated by this profound joy for the gifts of communication received for the building-up of all, in this solid fraternity, I invoke on each one of you the Blessing of the Most High. *From the Vatican, 24 January 1988, the Feast of Saint Francis de Sales* **IOANNES PAULUS PP. II**

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana