



# The Holy See

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## **MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II**

### **FOR THE 30th WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY "The Media: Modern Forum**

**for Promoting the Role of Women in Society"**[Sunday, 19 May 1996]

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

This year, the theme for World Communications Day, "The Media: Modern Forum for Promoting the Role of Women in Society", recognizes that the communications media play a crucial role not only in promoting justice and equality for women but in fostering appreciation for their specific feminine gifts, which elsewhere I have called the "genius" of women (cf. [\*Mulieris Dignitatem\*](#), 30; [\*Letter to Women\*](#), 10).

Last year, in my [\*Letter to Women\*](#), I sought to advance a dialogue, especially with women themselves, on what it means to be a woman in our time (cf. No. 1). I also pointed out some of "the obstacles which in so many parts of the world still keep women from being fully integrated into social, political and economic life" (No. 4). This is a dialogue which people in the communications media can, indeed have an obligation to, foster and support. People in the media often become advocates, and commendably so, of the voiceless and the marginalized. They are in a unique position also to stimulate public consciousness with regard to two serious issues concerning women in today's world.

First, as I noted in my Letter, motherhood is often penalized rather than rewarded, even though humanity owes its very survival to those women who have chosen to be wives and mothers (cf. No. 4). It is certainly an injustice that such women should be discriminated against, economically or socially, precisely for following that fundamental vocation. Likewise I pointed out that there is an urgent need to achieve real equality in every area: equal pay for equal work, protection for working mothers, fairness in career advancement, equality of spouses with regard to family rights, and the recognition of everything that is part of the rights and duties of citizens in a democratic State (cf. No. 4).

Secondly, the advancement of women's genuine emancipation is a matter of justice, which can no

longer be overlooked; it is also a question of society's welfare. Fortunately, there is a growing awareness that women must be enabled to play their part in the solution of the serious problems of society and of society's future. In every area, "a greater presence of women in society will prove most valuable, for it will help to manifest the contradictions present when society is organized solely according to the criteria of efficiency and productivity, and it will force systems to be redesigned in a way which favours the processes of humanization which mark the 'civilization of love'" (ibid., No. 4).

The "civilization of love" consists, most particularly, in a radical affirmation of the value of life and of the value of love. Women are especially qualified and privileged in both of these areas. Regarding life, although not alone responsible for affirming its intrinsic value, women enjoy a unique capacity for doing so because of their intimate connection with the mystery of life's transmission. Regarding love, women can bring to every aspect of life, including the highest levels of decision-making, that essential quality of femininity which consists in objectivity of judgment, tempered by the capacity to understand in depth the demands of interpersonal relationships.

The communications media, including the press, the cinema, radio and television, the music industry and computer networks, represent the modern forum where information is received and transmitted rapidly to a global audience, where ideas are exchanged, where attitudes are formed - and, indeed, where a new culture is being shaped. The media are therefore destined to exercise a powerful influence in determining whether society fully recognizes and appreciates not only the rights but also the special gifts of women.

Sadly though, we often see not the exaltation but the exploitation of women in the media. How often are they treated not as persons with an inviolable dignity but as objects whose purpose is to satisfy others' appetite for pleasure or for power? How often is the role of woman as wife and mother undervalued or even ridiculed? How often is the role of women in business or professional life depicted as a masculine caricature, a denial of the specific gifts of feminine insight, compassion and understanding, which so greatly contribute to the "civilization of love"?

Women themselves can do much to foster better treatment of women in the media: by promoting sound media education programmes, by teaching others, especially their families, to be discriminating consumers in the media market, by making known their views to production companies, publishers, broadcasting networks and advertisers with regard to programmes and publications which insult the dignity of women or debase their role in society. Moreover, women can and should prepare themselves for positions of responsibility and creativity in the media, not in conflict with or imitation of masculine roles but by impressing their own "genius" on their work and professional activity.

The media would do well to focus on the true heroines of society, including the saintly women of the Christian tradition, as role models for the young and for future generations. Nor can we forget,

in this respect, the many consecrated women who have sacrificed all to follow Jesus and to dedicate themselves to prayer and to the service of the poor, the sick, the illiterate, the young, the old, the handicapped. Some of these women are themselves involved in the communications media - working so that "the poor have the Gospel preached to them" (cf. Lk 4:18).

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord" (Lk 1:46). The Blessed Virgin Mary used these words in responding to the salutation of her cousin Elizabeth, thus acknowledging the "great things" that God had done in her. The image of women communicated by the media should include the recognition that every feminine gift proclaims the greatness of the Lord, the Lord who has communicated life and love, goodness and grace, the Lord who is the source of the dignity and equality of women, and of their special "genius".

My prayer is that this Thirtieth World Communications Day will encourage all those involved in the media of social communication, especially the sons and daughters of the Church, to promote the genuine advancement of women's dignity and rights, by projecting a true and respectful image of their role in society, and by bringing out "the full truth about women" (*Letter to Women*, No. 12).

*From the Vatican, 24 January 1996, the Feast of Saint Francis de Sales*

**IOANNES PAULUS PP. II**