



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II FOR THE 18TH WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY

"Social Communication: Instruments of Encounter Between Faith and Culture"

[Sunday, 3 June 1984]

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,¹ Desired by the Second Vatican Council to "make the Church's multiple apostolate in the field of social communication more effective" (*Decree Inter Mirifica*, no. 18), this annual Day, which is being celebrated for the eighteenth time, has the scope of ever better educating the faithful in their duties in such an important sector. On this occasion, in the first place I wish to exhort each of you to join me in prayer that the world of social communication, with its operators and multitude of receivers, may faithfully carry out its function in the service of truth, freedom and the promotion of the whole man in all people. The theme chosen for this eighteenth day is of great importance: Social Communications, Instrument of Encounter between Faith and Culture. Culture, faith and communication are three realities among which a relationship is established on which depend the present and the future of our civilization, which is called to express itself ever more fully in its planetary dimension.² Culture, as I had the opportunity to say earlier (cf. *Discourse to UNESCO*, 2 June 1980), is a specific dimension of the existence and being of man. It creates among the persons within each community a complex of bonds, determining the interpersonal and social character of human existence. Man is both subject and creator of culture in which he expresses himself and finds his equilibrium. Faith is the meeting between God and man: to God, who in history reveals and realizes his plan of salvation, man responds through faith, receiving and making his own this plan, directing his life to this message (cf. Rm 10:9, 2 Cor 4:13). Faith is a gift from God to which man's resolve must correspond. But if culture is the specifically human way to approach ever more being and if, on the other hand, in faith man opens himself to knowledge of the Supreme Being in whose image and likeness he was created (cf. Gen 1:26), there is no one who does not see what a profound relationship there is between one and the other human experience. One understands, then, why the Second Vatican Council wanted to emphasize the "outstanding incentives and encouragements" which the mystery of Christian faith offers to man that he may fulfill with greater commitment the task of building up a more human world, that is, one corresponding to his "total vocation" (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 57). And further: culture in itself is communication: communication not only and not so much of man with the environment that he is called to dominate (cf. Gn 2:19-20, 1:28) as of man with other men. Indeed,

culture is a relational and social dimension of human existence. Enlightened by faith, it expresses also man's full communication with God in Christ and, upon contact with the truths revealed by God, more easily finds the foundation of the human truths which foster the common good.³ Faith and culture, therefore, are called to meet and to interact precisely in the sphere of communications: the effective achievement of the meeting and interaction, as well as their intensity and effectiveness, in large measure depends on the suitability of the media through which communication takes place. The press, cinema, the theater, radio, television, with the evolution which each of these media has undergone during the course of history, have proved to be not always adequate to the encounter between faith and culture. The culture of our time particularly seems to be dominated and shaped by the newest and most powerful among the means of communication - radio and, above all, television - so much so that at times they seem to assert themselves as ends and not as simple means, also because of the characteristics of organization and structure which they require. Nevertheless, this aspect of modern mass-media must not make us forget that it is a question always, of means of communication and that this, by its nature, is always the communication of something. The content of the communication is therefore always determinant, and such, indeed, as to qualify the communication itself. Hence, with regard to the contents, the sense of responsibility of the communicators as well as the critical sense of the receivers must always be stressed.⁴ Certain disappointing aspects of the use of the modern mass media must not make us forget that with their contents they can become marvellous instruments for the spread of the Gospel, suitable to the times, capable of reaching the remotest corners of the earth. In particular, they can be of great help in catechesis, as I pointed out in the Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* (no. 46). May those who use the means of social communication for the purposes of evangelization - contributing also to building up in this way a cultural fabric in which man, aware of his relationship with God, becomes more man - be therefore aware of their lofty mission. May they have the necessary professional competence and may they feel the responsibility of transmitting the Gospel message in its purity and totality, without confusing the divine doctrine with men's opinions. Indeed, the mass media, whether they deal with news or concern themselves with precisely cultural topics, or whether they are used for the purpose of artistic expression and entertainment, always return to a particular concept of man; and it is precisely on the basis of the exactness and completeness of this concept that they will be judged. At this point my appeal becomes stronger and is addressed to all workers in the field of social communications, in whatever location and of whatever religion:--Operators of communications, do not give an incomplete, distorted picture of man, one closed to authentic human values!--Give space to the transcendent, which makes man more man!--Do not deride religious values, do not ignore them, do not interpret them according to ideological schemes!--May your information be always inspired by criteria of truth and justice; may you feel the duty to rectify and remedy when you happen to make an error.--Do not corrupt society, and in particular youth, by the approving and insistent depiction of evil, of violence, of moral abjection, carrying out a work of ideological manipulation, sowing discord!--All you who work in the mass media, know that your messages reach a mass that is such because of the number of its members, each of whom, however, is man, a person concrete and unique, who must be recognized and respected as such. Woe to anyone who will have given scandal, especially to the little ones! (cf. Mt. 18:6).--In short, commit yourselves to fostering a culture which is truly to man's standard, aware that by doing this you will facilitate the encounter with faith, which no one must fear.⁵ Unfortunately, a realistic examination leads us to recognize that in our time the immense potentials of the mass media are very often used against man, and that the prevailing culture disregards the encounter with faith, both in countries in which the free circulation of ideas is permitted and also in places where freedom of expression is confused with irresponsible license. It is the task of everyone to improve the field of social communication and to lead it back to its noble aims. May communicators adhere to the rules of a correct professional ethic. May critics carry out their useful clarifying action, fostering the formation of the critical awareness of the receivers. May the receivers

themselves know how to choose with prudent care books, newspapers, films, plays and television programmes in order to derive from them occasions of growth and not corruption. Furthermore, also through suitable associated forms, may they make their voice heard by the operators of the communication that it may always be respectful of man's dignity and his inalienable rights. And, with the words of the Second Vatican Council, I point out that the "civil authorities, which rightly regard the well-being of the citizens as their concern, are also bound to ensure, equitably and vigilantly, that public morality and social progress are not gravely endangered through the misuse of these media" (*Inter Mirifica*, no. 12).6. Indeed, since at the beginning of communication there is a man-communicator and, at its end, there is a man-receiver, the media of social communication will facilitate the encounter between faith and culture the more they foster the encounter of persons among themselves, so that a mass of isolated individuals will not be formed, each one of whom may be in dialogue with the written page, or the stage, or the small or large screen, but a community of persons aware of the importance of the meeting with faith and with culture and determined to achieve it through personal contact, in the family, in the place of employment, in social relations. May culture and faith, which find useful and often indispensable direct or indirect aids in the mass media, circulate in the dialogue between parents and children, become enriched through the work of teachers and educators, develop through direct pastoral action, up to the personal encounter with Christ present in the Church and in his sacraments. With the intercession of Mary Most Holy, I invoke on the workers in the field of communications and on the vast community of receivers the heavenly favours of which my Apostolic Blessing is a pledge, that each one in his own role may commit himself to ensure that social communications be an ever more effective means of encounter between faith and culture. *From the Vatican, 24 May 1984* **IOANNES PAULUS PP. II**