



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL COMMISSION
FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS**

Thursday 7 March 1996

*Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Dear Friends in Christ,*

1. Once more I have the pleasant opportunity of greeting the members of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications on the occasion of your Plenary Meeting. As always, I am particularly glad to see your President Emeritus, Cardinal Deskur. I thank your President, Archbishop Foley, for his words of introduction, and I express to you all, and to the officials of the Council, my appreciation of your efforts to ensure an ever more responsible and active presence of the Church in the world of social communications.

2. Twenty-five years ago, in response to a mandate from the Second Vatican Council, the then Pontifical Commission for Social Communications published the Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio*, aimed at guiding Christians in their attitudes to the media and at making them more eager to commit themselves in this important field (cf. n. 2). That document was received with general satisfaction, and it has been the basis of a fruitful reflection and exchange of views throughout the Church, leading to a deeper understanding of the media as a providential divine gift for the proclamation of the Gospel and the advancement of humanity. Twenty years later, in view of rapid developments in communications technology and in related public policies, the Pontifical Council for Social Communications published the Pastoral Instruction *Aetatis Novae*, which offers a mature and extensive reflection on problems and opportunities in the field of communications at the dawn of a new era: the end of one Christian millennium and the beginning of another (cf. *Address to Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications*, 20 March 1992).

These two Pastoral Instructions present the principles and guidelines which continue to govern the Church's approach to the communications media at the service of the Good News of salvation in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and at the service of the unity and advancement - *Communio et Progressio* - of the entire human family. But in a sector of human activity which is undergoing change and development at an accelerated pace these principles and guidelines are constantly in need of further study and adaptation. Your Plenary Assembly does just this; and herein - lies - the specific contribution which you make to the universal pastoral ministry of the Successor of Peter, a contribution for which I am deeply grateful.

3. I note that the theme of your meeting this year is "Evangelizing through Media". Having examined what is happening in this field, you know that evangelization in the media of social communications is accomplished not only through a truthful and compelling presentation of the message of Jesus Christ. It is also fostered by presenting news about what the Church is doing in the name of Jesus, in all her many different activities in every corner of the world: in schools, in hospitals, in refugee relief programmes, in care for the poorest and most easily forgotten members of society. Evangelization is reinforced by a good Catholic press and good Catholic broadcasting, which explain and defend the teaching of Christ's Church and which help to deepen the commitment of the faithful by continuing the work of adult Christian education. It is aided by films and radio and television programmes which uplift the human spirit and, in this way, help to open the doors to the Redeemer.

Among all the many messages which travel on the wings of these extraordinarily powerful instruments, what message is more important to the human family as a whole, and to every individual, than the truth concerning our very existence: the truth of where we come from, where we are going and how to get there - our origin in creation by God, our destiny in heaven with God, and our acceptance and following of Jesus Christ, the Way, and the Truth and the Life?

4. This year, your Assembly has given particular attention to a question which has enormous practical implications for individuals and families, as well as for society as a whole: the question of ethics in advertising. In order to grasp the complexity of the moral questions posed by this influential aspect of the world of broadcasting, publishing and communicating, it is enough to recall the imperative of respect for the truth in all human relations, or the importance for society of avoiding the pitfalls of an artificial and manipulative consumerism.

As Pastors and as members of the Catholic laity involved in the science and art of social communications, you will wish to encourage all efforts genuinely aimed at bringing to the media a renewed sense of public service and higher standards of decency. Not infrequently we hear complaints from families and from men and women of goodwill all over the world that films, television programmes and advertisements often include violent and sexually explicit scenes which erode moral and cultural values, and this even in children's programmes. Young viewers themselves frequently admit that they are deeply disturbed at these trends. More and more,

people are giving voice to their desire for greater accountability on the part of the media in the construction of a more decent and just society, a society respectful of religious and moral values and vigilant in protecting religious liberty.

5. The approach of the third Christian millennium is stirring many people to hope for a world in which there will be true peace, justice and solidarity. The Catholic media, and Catholics in the media, are being challenged to proclaim, with renewed dedication and commitment, the name of Jesus, his truth and his love, as the key not only to a more just society but to a glorious eternity.

As you continue your reflections, I promise you my prayers, and I gladly impart to you and your loved ones my Apostolic Blessing.

© Copyright 1996 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana