



The Holy See

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

Friday 28 February 1997

*Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

1. It is always a pleasure to meet the Members, Consultors and Staff of the *Pontifical Council for Social Communications* in the course of your annual Plenary Assembly. Your Council supports the ministry of the Successor of Peter in what pertains to the varied, dynamic and constantly evolving means of social communication and their place in the Church's mission to proclaim the Gospel of salvation to the ends of the earth. I am grateful for your diligent and expert co-operation and support, and for the pastoral charity with which you sustain the Church's action and that of individual Catholics in the communications world.

2. Your Meeting this year falls at the beginning of the three-year preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, towards which the whole Church is advancing, as it were on an intensely spiritual pilgrimage of faith. This preparation is in fact the focus of your discussions, particularly as it refers to "*communicating Jesus Christ: the Way, the Truth and the Life*", the theme of the 1997 World Communications Day.

For that occasion I have written: "The way of Christ is the way of a virtuous, fruitful and peaceful life as children of God and as brothers and sisters in the same human family; the *truth* of Christ is the eternal truth of God, who has revealed himself to us not only in the created world but also through Sacred Scripture, and especially in and through his Son, Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh; and the *life* of Christ is the life of grace, that free gift of God which enables us to live for ever in his love. When Christians are truly convinced of this, their lives are transformed". (cf. Message

for World Communications Day, 24 January 1997).

This is the message which must be broadcast with increasing effectiveness in order to help the people of our time to escape or shake off the spiritual emptiness which weighs heavily on the hearts of so many. This is the saving truth which we have a duty to transmit to the next generation, when all too many young people are being offered a useless and dangerous *diet of false illusions instead of their birthright of true knowledge of the meaning and purpose of their lives* (cf. *Gen 25:29-34*). At the end of a century of extraordinary progress but also of terrible human tragedy, the proclamation of Jesus Christ - *the same yesterday, today and for ever* (cf. *Heb 13:8*) - is not only a duty of obedience to a Gospel command but also the only sure means of responding to the urgent need for moral and spiritual discernment, without which individual lives and the social order itself are enveloped by arbitrariness and confusion.

3. Down the years, your Council has gained ample knowledge and experience of the world of social communications. You have published clear guidelines for the Church's Pastors and for those involved in the press, radio, television cinema and other media. You have drawn attention to certain problematical areas as in your most recent document, published just this week, on *Ethics in Advertising*. You have sought to impress on media professionals their responsibility to serve the truth, to defend human dignity and freedom, and to enlighten the consciences of their readers, listeners and viewers.

In the context of preparation for the Great Jubilee, I encourage your Council to continue to promote high standards, better co-ordination and increased efficacy in the specifically Catholic media. I also take this opportunity to thank you for your work in helping to bring to listeners and viewers some of the more important papal ceremonies and events, such as the Christmas and Easter Masses which are now followed by hundreds of millions throughout the world. I am grateful to the radio and television networks and the sponsoring organizations which make these annual appointments possible.

4. At this time you have a special part to play in making the whole Church aware of the positive role of the means of social communication in ensuring a correct celebration of the Jubilee. The challenge is to see to it that the world is properly informed of the true meaning of the Year 2000, the anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ. The Jubilee cannot be a mere remembrance of a past event, however extraordinary. It is to be the celebration of a Living Presence, and an invitation to look towards the Second Coming of our Saviour, when he will establish once and for all his kingdom of justice, love and peace. May Mary, who two thousand years ago offered to the world the Incarnate Word, guide the men and women of the media towards the One who is "the true light that enlightens every man" (*Jn 1:9*; cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 59). May you be sustained and encouraged in your work by the enlightening gifts of the Holy Spirit.

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