



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO PARTICIPANTS IN A CONGRESS ON  
"DIGITAL WITNESSES.  
FACES AND LANGUAGES IN THE CROSS-MEDIA AGE"  
ORGANIZED BY THE ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE (CEI)**

Paul VI Audience Hall  
Saturday, 24 April 2010

*Your Eminence,  
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,  
Dear Friends,*

I am glad of this occasion to meet you and to conclude your Congress that has a particularly evocative title: "Digital Witnesses: Faces and Languages in the Cross-Media Age". I thank Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, President of the Italian Episcopal Conference, for his cordial words of welcome with which, once again, he has wished to express the affection and closeness to my apostolic service of the Church in Italy. Your words, Your Eminence, mirror the faithful adherence to Peter of all the Catholics of this beloved nation and the esteem of so many men and women motivated by the desire to seek the truth.

The present time is experiencing an enormous expansion of the frontiers of communication, bringing about an unheard of convergence among the different *media* and making interactivity possible. The internet is therefore revealing a vocation that is open, basically egalitarian and pluralist but at the same time it is creating a new boundary: indeed, people are talking about the *digital divide*.

This divide separates the included from the excluded and adds to the other discrepancies that are already distancing nations from one another and dividing them from within. The dangers of standardization and control, of intellectual and moral relativism, already clearly recognizable in the erosion of the critical spirit, the subordination of truth to the play of opinions, the multiple forms of

degradation and humiliation of the person's intimacy. We are therefore witnessing a "pollution of the spirit; it makes us smile less, makes our faces gloomier, less likely to greet each other or look each other in the eye" (*Address for the Immaculate Conception*, Piazza di Spagna, 8 December 2009). This Congress, on the other hand aims precisely to focus on faces, hence to surmount those collective dynamics that can cause us to lose our perception of the depths of the person by stopping at appearances. When this happens, people are left as bodies without a soul, objects of exchange and consumption.

How is it possible to focus anew on the face? I have also tried to point out the way in [my third Encyclical](#). It passes through that *caritas in veritate*, which shines out in Christ's Face. Love of truth is "a great challenge for the Church in a world that is becoming progressively and pervasively globalized" (n. 9). The *media* can become factors of humanization, "not only when, thanks to their technological development, they increase the possibilities of communicating information, but above all when they are geared towards a vision of the person and the common good that reflects truly universal values" (n. 73). This requires that they "focus on promoting the dignity of persons and peoples, they need to be clearly inspired by charity and placed at the service of truth, of the good, and of natural and supernatural fraternity" (*ibid.*). Only on these conditions can the epochal change we are passing through be fruitful and rich in new opportunities. Let us set sail on the digital sea fearlessly, confronting open navigation with the same enthusiasm that has steered the Barque of the Church for 2,000 years. Rather than for technical resources, although these are necessary, let us also qualify ourselves by dwelling in this world with a believing heart that helps to give a soul to the ceaseless flow of communications that makes up the web.

This is our mission, the inalienable mission of the Church. Every believer who works in the *media* has a "special responsibility for opening the door to new forms of encounter, maintaining the quality of human interaction and showing concern for individuals and their genuine spiritual needs. They can thus help the men and women of our digital age to sense the Lord's presence" (*Message for the 44th World Day of Social Communications*, 16 May 2010). Dear friends, you are also called to post yourselves on the web as "leaders of communities", attentive to "preparing ways that lead to the word of God" and showing special sensitivity to "the disheartened and those who have a deep, unarticulated desire for enduring truth and the absolute" (*ibid.*). The web can thus become a sort of "Court of the Gentiles", "offering a space... for those who have not yet come to know God" (*ibid.*).

As leaders of the world of culture and communications, you are a vital sign that "Church communities have always used the modern media for fostering communication, engagement with society, and, increasingly, for encouraging dialogue at a wider level" (*ibid.*). In Italy, voices in this field are not lacking. It suffices here to recall the daily *Avvenire*, the television broadcasting station *TV2000*, the radiophonic circuit *inBlu*, and the press agency *SIR*, alongside the Catholic periodicals, the diocesan weeklies and the now numerous websites of Catholic inspiration. I urge all professionals in communications never to tire of nourishing in their hearts that healthy

*passion for man* which seeks to draw ever closer to his many languages and to his true face. A sound theological training will help you in this and, especially, a profound and joyful *passion for God*, fostered by continuous exchanges with the Lord. The particular Churches and religious institutes, for their part, should not hesitate to make the most of the formation courses offered by the Pontifical universities, by the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart and by the other Catholic and ecclesiastical universities, earmarking for them, with foresight, people and resources. The world of the media is fully part of pastoral planning.

As I thank you for the service you offer to the Church and thus to the human cause, I urge you, enlivened by the courage of the Holy Spirit, to set out on the highways of the digital continent. Our trust is not a-critically placed in any one technical instrument. Our efforts consist in being Church, a believing community that can witness to all to the perennial newness of the Risen One, with a life that flourishes in fullness to the extent that it is open, enters into relationships and is freely given.

I entrust you to the protection of Mary Most Holy and of the great Saints of communications and I cordially bless you all.

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