



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II FOR THE 25th WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY

"The Communications Media and the Unity and Progress of the Human Family"

[Sunday, 12 May 1991]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

For the celebration of this World Communications Day, we return to the theme which formed the central message of the Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio*, approved by Pope Paul VI in 1971, regarding the application of the Decree of the Second Vatican Council on the Means of Social Communication. Prepared in obedience to the Council Fathers wishes, that Instruction saw the chief aims of social communication and all the means it uses as the unity and progress of the human family. On the Twentieth Anniversary of this important Document, I wish to return to that basic consideration in order to invite the members of the Church to reflect once more on the serious problems and rich new opportunities occasioned by continuing developments in the communications media, especially in relation to the unity and progress of peoples everywhere.

The Church has long held the conviction that the media (press, radio, television, film and cinema) are to be regarded as "gifts of God" (cf. Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Miranda Prorsus*, AAS, 24 [1957], p. 765). The list of the "gifts" which comprise the communications media has continued to lengthen since the Pastoral Instruction was published. Such contemporary items as satellites, computers, home video recorders and ever improving methods for the transmission of information are now at the disposal of the human family. The purpose of these new gifts is the same as that of the more traditional communications media: to draw us closer together in brotherhood and mutual understanding, and to help us to go forward in the pursuit of our human destiny as God's beloved sons and daughters.

The link between this general consideration and the reflection I wish to offer on this occasion is

clear and direct: such powerful means placed at man's disposal demand in their use a lofty sense of responsibility on the part of all involved. In the words of the 1971 Pastoral Instruction, the communications media are "lifeless instruments". Whether or not they fulfil the purpose for which they were given to us greatly depends on the wisdom and sense of responsibility with which they are used.

In the Christian view, the communications media are wonderful instruments at man's disposal, under God's Providence, for building closer and more enlightened relationships between individuals and throughout the human family. Indeed, as they develop, the media are capable of fashioning a new language which enables people to know and understand one another more easily, and therefore to work together more readily for the common good (cf. *Communio et Progressio*, 12). If however they are to be effective means of fellowship and genuine human advancement, the media must be a channel and expression of truth, justice and peace, good will and active charity, mutual help, love and communion (cf. *ibid.*, 12 and 13). Whether the media serve to enrich or impoverish man's nature depends on the moral vision and ethical responsibility of those involved in the communications process and of the recipients of the media's message.

Every member of the human family, whether the humblest consumer or the most powerful producer of media programmes, has an individual responsibility in this respect. I therefore appeal to the Pastors of the Church and to the Catholic faithful who are engaged in the world of communications to refresh their knowledge of the principles and guidelines which were so clearly set out in *Communio et Progressio*. May all better understand where their duty lies and may they be encouraged to carry out these duties as a fundamental service to the unity and progress of the human family.

It is my hope that this Twenty-fifth World Communications Day will be an occasion of renewed attention on the part of parishes and local communities to the realities of the media and their influence on society, on the family, and on individuals, especially children and young people. Twenty years after *Communio et Progressio* it is possible to subscribe fully to that. Document's warning and expectation about developments in communications: "Suddenly... the responsibilities of the People of God will enormously increase. Never before will they have been offered such opportunities. It will be possible to ensure that the media promote the advance of the whole human race... It will be possible to strengthen the brotherhood of man. And then the Good News can be given everywhere, bearing witness to Christ the Saviour" (n. 182). I earnestly ask God to guide and support you in the realization of that great hope and task!

From the Vatican, 24 January 1991, the Feast of Saint Francis de Sales.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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