



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II FOR THE 27th WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY

"Videocassettes and audiocassettes in the formation of culture and of conscience"

[Sunday, 23 May 1993]

My dear brothers and sisters,

More than a full year after the publication of the Church's latest pastoral instruction on communications media, *Aetatis Novae*, we are still reflecting on the vision of the modern world which it presented, and still trying to grasp the practical implications of the media situation it described. This is precisely what the Church would wish us to do. The entire family of the Church must involve itself prayerfully in the search for understanding and awareness in the unprecedented situations so often nowadays cast up by the world's headlong progress in discovery and development. Each individual must add his voice to the Church's unceasing petition for wisdom, for we greatly need divine guidance in order to grasp each opportunity that offers to serve God and His people, while at the same time taking the measures necessary to fend off whatever evil may threaten them.

The pastoral instruction *Aetatis Novae*, we should notice, uses the word "new" even in its own title. "At the dawn of a new era", it says, "a vast expansion of human communications is profoundly influencing culture everywhere", and it goes on to claim that everybody is affected. The instruction uses the word "new" again and again: "new media", "new languages", "new opportunities", in its anxiety to illustrate that the world in the Eighties and Nineties is no longer the same as it was in previous decades and generations. The argument is that the world in which God's people are on pilgrimage is quite largely a changed place, and that "new media" are quite largely responsible for changing it. The pilgrim people, however, must adapt to what is changed, must find ways to cope with it, must search to turn it to God's glory and the service of all his creation.

In my message for World Communications Day last year, I mentioned that among the things we always celebrate on this annual occasion are the gifts of speech, of hearing, and of sight, which God has given us in order to make communication possible between us. This year the theme of the Day focuses on two specific "new" media which serve these very senses in a quite remarkable way, namely, audiocassettes and videocassettes.

These are truly remarkable gifts of God to our times, making it possible for us to conserve and easily transport, so that we may hear and view them over and over again, by ourselves or in the company of others, in our homes or elsewhere, as we choose, unlimited numbers of programmes in voice or vision, or both, whether for instruction or entertainment, for more complete understanding of news and information, or solely, perhaps, for artistic enjoyment.

Let me say again, and with emphasis, that the audiocassette and the videocassette are gifts of God, gifts, we may say, kept in His treasury through all the ages until our time, kept — for us. We must clearly understand that he did not give them to us for our harm. "All things you love", says Wisdom, "nor hold any of your creatures in abhorrence; hate and create you could not, nor does aught abide save at your will, whose summoning word hold them in being. They are yours, and you spare them, ... you the Master of them all" (Wisdom 11:24-25).

It is not by accident that we find ourselves exactly where we are in this passing world, and at this passing moment, never to be repeated, in the history of the human race. This has come about by a special disposition of God's providence. He wills us to be here, now and at no other time, with opportunities to serve our contemporaries by means never before available or even imagined, and thus to render glory to His Majesty in ways never previously possible.

For those engaged professionally in the production of audio or video programmes in cassette or other forms, there will often be opportunities to integrate the Christian message in one way or another, explicitly or implicitly, "into the 'new culture' created by modern communications" (A.N. 11). This is something which should be expected to happen as a natural consequence of "the Church's active, sympathetic presence within the world of communications" (ibid.).

The professional who rates at its true value the impact and influence of the media productions he creates, will take particular care to make them of such high moral quality that their effect upon the formation of the culture of his generation, will be invariably a positive one. To be true to himself, to his craft, and to his faith, he must evidently resist the ever-present blandishments of easy profit, and firmly refuse to take part in any production which exploits human weakness, offends human conscience, or affronts human dignity.

The role of the non-specialist, or "ordinary Christian/citizen", in relation to media such as the audio- or video-cassette, must not be seen as that of a consumer merely. Each individual, simply by making his reactions to the media offerings placed before him known to those who produce and

market them, will exercise a definite effect on the subject matter and moral tone of future offerings. The consumer must take very seriously his responsibility to make this active contribution to the protection and improvement of the media environment in which he and his dependents must exist.

To all the media professionals, men and women, who strive to serve their fellows in the various branches of the social communications industry, to all the beloved members of the International Catholic Organisations for Media active and at their posts throughout the world, and to the vast body of media consumers who are their audience and very weighty responsibility, I send, with affection and warmest fellow-feelings, on this World Communications Day, my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 24 January 1993, the Feast of Saint Francis of Sales

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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