



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO REPRESENTATIVES OF THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS

Saturday, 21 October 1978

Ladies and Gentlemen, I bid you welcome! And thank you heartily for everything you have done, and for everything you will do, to present to the general public, in the press, on the radio, and on television, the events in the Catholic Church which have gathered you several times at Rome within the last two months. Certainly, at the mere professional level, you have lived through days as tiring as they were moving. The sudden, unforeseeable character of the facts that followed one another, obliged you to appeal to a sum of knowledge in the area of religious information that was, perhaps, unfamiliar to you; and then to meet, under conditions that were sometimes feverish, a requirement marked by the malady of the century: haste. For you, to wait for the white smoke was not a restful hour! Thank you in the first place for having echoed so widely, with unanimous respect, the extensive and really historic labour of the great Pope Paul VI. Thank you for having made so familiar the smiling face and the evangelical attitude of my immediate Predecessor, John Paul I. Thank you again for the favourable coverage you gave to the recent conclave, to my election and to the first steps I have taken in the heavy office of the pontificate. In any case, it was an opportunity for you not only to speak of persons — who pass — but of the See of Rome, of the Church, her traditions and her rites, her faith, her problems and her hopes, of St Peter and the role of the Pope, of the great spiritual stakes of today: in short, of the mystery of the Church. Allow me to dwell a little on this aspect: it is difficult to present well the true face of the Church.

Yes, it is always difficult to read events, and to enable others to read them. In the first place they are nearly always complex. It is enough for an element to be forgotten inadvertently, omitted deliberately, minimized or on the contrary emphasized disproportionately, to distort the present vision and the forecasts to come. Ecclesial events, furthermore, are more difficult to grasp for those who contemplate them—I say it in all respect for everyone—outside a vision of faith, and even more difficult to express to a large public which has difficulty in perceiving their real meaning. You must, nevertheless, arouse the interest and win a hearing from this public, while your agencies ask you often and above all for the sensational. Some are then tempted to drop into the anecdote: it is concrete and it may be very good, but on condition that the anecdote is significant and really related to the nature of the religious phenomenon. Others plunge courageously into a very advanced analysis of the problems and motives of ecclesial persons, with the risk of not considering sufficiently the essential which, as you know, is not of a political but of a spiritual

nature. Finally, from this last point of view, things are often more simple than is imagined: I hardly dare speak of my election!

But this is not the time to examine in detail all the risks and merits of your task as reporters of religious news. Let us note, moreover, that here and there some progress seems to be visible in pursuit of the truth, and in understanding and presentation of the religious phenomenon. I congratulate you on the part you have played in it.

Perhaps you yourselves have been surprised and encouraged by the importance attributed to it, in all countries, by a very wide public which some people thought was indifferent or allergic to the ecclesiastical institution and to spiritual things. In actual fact, the handing down of the supreme office, entrusted by Christ to St Peter, with regard to all the peoples to be evangelized and to all the disciples of Christ to be gathered in unity, really appeared as a reality transcending habitual events. Yes, the handing down of this office has a deep echo in spirits and in hearts which perceive that God is at work in history. It was loyal to acknowledge it and to adapt to it the media of social communication which, in different degrees, you have at your disposal.

It is my wish precisely that craftsmen of religious information may always find the help they need from competent ecclesial organisms. The latter must receive them in respect for their convictions and their profession, supply them with very adequate and very objective documentation, but also propose to them a Christian perspective which sets facts in their true significance for the Church and for mankind. In this way you will be able to tackle these religious reports with the specific competence that they demand.

You are very concerned about freedom of information and of expression: you are right. Think yourselves lucky to enjoy it! Use this freedom well to grasp the truth more closely and to admit your readers, your listeners or viewers into "whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious", to repeat the words of St Paul (Phil 4:8); into what helps them to live in justice and brotherhood, to discover the ultimate meaning of life, to open them up to the mystery of God, so near each of us. Under these conditions, your profession, so demanding and sometimes so exhausting—I was going to say your vocation—so topical and so beautiful will elevate further the spirit and the heart of men of good will, at the same time as the faith of Christians. It is a service which the Church and humanity appreciate.

I venture to call upon you also to an effort of comprehension, as to a loyal pact: when you report on the life and activity of the Church, try even more to grasp the authentic, deep and spiritual motivations of the Church's thought and action. The Church, on her side, listens to the objective testimony of journalists on the expectations and demands of this world. That does not mean, of course, that she models her message on the world of her time: it is the Gospel that must always inspire her attitude.

I am happy at this first contact with you. I assure you of my understanding and I take the liberty of relying on yours. I know that in addition to your professional problems, to which we will come back another time, you each have your personal and family cares. Let us not be afraid to entrust them to the Virgin Mary, who is always at Christ's side. And in Christ's name, I willingly bless you.

[The Holy Father then continued in English]:

I would like to offer my greetings and my blessing, not only to you, but to all your colleagues throughout the world. Although you represent different cultures, you are all united in the service of truth. And the corps that you make up here today is, in itself, a splendid manifestation of unity and solidarity. I would ask to be remembered to your families and to your fellow citizens in your respective countries.

Please accept—all of you—my expression of respect, esteem and fraternal love.

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