



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE PONTIFICAL COMMISSION
FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS**

Thursday, 7 March 1985

*Dear Brother Bishops,
My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

IT IS A GREAT joy to be with you at this meeting in which you are assembling for the first time with your new President Archbishop John Foley. "Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ".

Twenty years ago, the Second Vatican Council declared that among the marvels of technology which God has destined human genius to discover in his creation, those which have a powerful effect on human minds are the ones which interest the Church most.

This week, you have come to Rome to reflect the Church's intense interest in the means of social communication which have such a profound influence on human minds, on human aspirations and on human conduct.

First, if the means of social communication are used well, people can come to know the *truth* and they can be freed from ignorance, from prejudice, from isolation and from that violation of human dignity which comes about when the communications media are manipulated in order to control and to restrict human thought.

This is a moment when you are supremely conscious of Jesus' words: "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free". Ontological truth consists in the conformity of every existing thing to the exemplary idea in the mind of the Creator; in this sense, every being is true and every rational being is free. Logical truth consists in the conformity of mental concepts to actual reality,

and it is here where the unscrupulous have sought to portray through the communications media a false reality so that human minds might be deceived and hence controlled – so that human thought might reflect not the world as it is but a vision of the world which a minority might wish to impose.

Thus, the Church must continue to declare the right of the human family to the truth – a truth which is not limited to material reality but acknowledges also divine transcendence. Faith is the acceptance of a truth communicated but not directly experienced – a truth revealed by God in the world he has made and in the Word he has sent.

Deception is a deprivation of human dignity and a distraction from human destiny; it has its origin in the father of lies. God, on the other hand, is the author of truth – and it is the right and the responsibility of the Church to be not only the communicator of truth but also its defender. The Church must be an exemplar of truth if she is to be faithful to her vocation, and she must be a herald of truth – of the Good News of Jesus Christ – if she is to be faithful to her mission. Saint Paul reminds us: “We cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth”.

If the truth is liberating and if the Good News of Jesus Christ is both saving and uplifting, then the means of communication can truly be an expression of human aspiration and an incentive to Christian *hope*.

The freedom which comes from truth can give the human family a vision of what it can be, of what it should be – and it can give to every human being awareness of the destiny God has prepared for us because of the dignity he has conferred upon us. Where the means of social communication do not reflect truth, they take away hope. And human beings experience oppression, enslavement and despair.

The means of social communication must offer to the human family hope – the hope to realize their dignity as sons and daughters of a loving Father who has called them to a life of holiness here, and who has destined them for a life of eternal happiness hereafter.

The so-called entertainment media offer special opportunities for the communication of hope through stories which encourage, through models which inspire and through shared experiences which console and comfort. The means of social communication can indeed comfort the afflicted and renew hope.

Perhaps the effects of social communication most easily seen, however, are those expressed in human conduct. We know that words transmitted over radio or written in newspapers can incite anger; we know that images projected in films or on television can unleash passion. These are certainly dangers which must be avoided; temptations which should be resisted.

What is often not so readily recalled, however, is that the communications media – as their name

implies – can be a catalyst for *unity* and an invitation to *charity*.

The news media recently focused the attention of the world on the plight of those in danger of starvation in Africa – and the outpouring of assistance from those moved by the plight of their brothers and sisters in need was most gratifying.

The news media have played this role of evoking sympathetic response in time of need over and over again – and they have helped to bind the human family more closely through practical charity. May they continue to do so wherever there is need!

Through sensitive dramatic presentations in film or on television, individuals can also deepen their insight into a full range of human needs and can be disposed to respond with love and understanding to the troubled, to the lonely, to the sick and to the needy. One of the signs of love, moreover, is *presence*. God is present to all the things he has made. Otherwise they would not continue to exist: he has called us into being because of love, and he sustains us in being because of love. What unites us as members of the human family – what makes us present to one another – should, therefore, remind us that we are all children of one Father.

The modern communications media make such unity possible through the shared experience of what is reported or even through simultaneous presence at one event through electronic links which span the globe and reach even into space.

We can be moved together by the shared experience of one tragedy; we can be inspired together through a shared experience of human triumph. We can, in brief, be united through the modern means of communication – united in the truth of a shared experience, united in the articulation of a common aspiration, united in a shared response to human need, or in shared admiration of human heroism. We can, perhaps as never before, be *one in faith, hope and charity*.

Yes, your activities as members of the Pontifical Commission for Social Communications are extremely important. You reflect the Church's intense desire not only to communicate the Good News of Jesus Christ through the communications media but also to promote unity and charity in our still divided world. Through the marvels that man has discovered in the world God created, you are seeking to communicate the light of Christ's liberating truth and the warmth of his saving love.

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