



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL COMMISSION
FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS**

Friday, 24 February 1989

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. It is a pleasure to receive the members and consultors of the Pontifical Commission for Social Communications, in this year which is so significant for the Commission.

Just over twenty-five years ago, in December 1963, the Second Vatican Council promulgated the Decree "Inter Mirifica", on the means of social communication. Three months later, my predecessor Paul VI issued the Motu Proprio "In fructibus multis", by which the Pontifical Commission for Social Communications was established. At the beginning of next month, in conformity with the Motu Proprio "Pastor Bonus", the Commission becomes a Pontifical Council which, under this new title, and acting in close cooperation with the Secretariat of State, will continue to concern itself with the important task of the proclamation of the message of salvation as transmitted and recorded by the communications media.

Thus, your plenary meeting marks an important moment in the history of the Commission and is also a precious opportunity for studying some of the pressing issues which the Church is facing in relation to the spread of the Gospel message. I would like to share with you some of my own concerns in this area, concerns which indeed are also yours and those of the Church at large. I offer them to you in a spirit of service and mutual trust.

2. First, we know that the communications media exert a great influence in the *formation of consciences*, and consequently of *moral attitudes*. We should therefore earnestly see to it that the media help people to form their consciences and those moral attitudes, in a way which not only upholds the law of God but also defends their very nature as human beings created in God's

image and endowed with an innate and inalienable dignity which must be respected in every circumstance.

One area in which the media exert an almost irresistible influence on society is *the area of family life*. The support which the media will give to the family and to its role in society will determine to a great extent the strength and stability of this essential institution in the coming decades. All too often, unfortunately, the family is inadequately presented in the media. Infidelity, sexual experimentation outside marriage, and the absence of a moral and spiritual vision of the marriage covenant are presented uncritically. The Church is concerned that the media, through films, television programmes, and magazine and newspaper articles should play a more constructive part in fostering the value of permanent loving commitment in family life, for the good of individuals and of society.

While the media investigate and present the events and views of our time, it is imperative that this be done in a balanced manner. The *sensitivity of the world media to basic human rights* is a case in point. Indeed many people in communications deserve to be acknowledged for their dedication to the cause of improving the situation of human rights around the world. But it is not enough to champion certain rights while neglecting other even more fundamental human rights, as for example the right to life itself--a right which exists from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death. In this context, we should also reflect on how the media treat the question of *religious freedom*: the freedom to worship God and to communicate to others that religious message which we believe to be the truth revealed by God.

3. *How does the Church herself use the media?*

This and the following questions require our careful attention. Do we encourage the faithful to use the media intelligently - not only to avoid publications, films and programmes which can damage the moral integrity of the person, but also to profit from the media as one profits from good books for intellectual and moral growth, for an ever deeper appreciation of the good things God has done for us and for an ever deeper understanding of the dignity of every human being?

Do we cooperate as fully as possible with other Christians, with other believers and with all men and women of good will in order to influence the media to work for the common good, for the moral well-being of society and for peace, mutual respect and greater unity within the human family? Do we seek to encourage and prepare men and women with creative gifts to use their talents responsibly and imaginatively in the media?

The Lord Jesus commanded his disciples to spread the Good News of salvation to the ends of the earth, and the Church must employ all the means at her disposal in reaching this goal. The publications, programmes and films which appear in the name of the Church should aim for the highest possible standards of professional excellence, and at the same time be truly edifying in the

sense of contributing to authentic human and religious growth.

4. Your Commission has already prepared a suggested pastoral response to the *scourge of pornography and violence* in the media and has sought to encourage programmes of media education for adults and in schools. Such efforts should continue and intensify so that individuals may be protected from manipulation by the media, and may be able to use the media ever more intelligently for the enrichment of their minds and for wholesome relaxation.

Your Commission has also established as one of its priorities the *formation of media professionals*, men and women primarily skilled in the techniques of communication but also endowed with an informed Christian outlook. Such media professionals should be men and women of unquestioned integrity and honesty and should give an example of a sound moral life, for they are often viewed by others as models to be imitated. It is also particularly important that those who will be called upon to speak for the Church should truly think with the Church - *sentire cum ecclesia*.

5. In this way, as we prepare to celebrate the second millennium of the birth of Jesus Christ, we will be able to evangelize effectively through programmes and publications of professional excellence which touch the hearts and minds of those searching for that truth and love which can only be found in the one true God.

Just over twenty-five years ago, the Second Vatican Council opened its Decree on the communications media with the words: "Among the marvels of technology which God has destined human genius to discover in his creation, those which have a powerful effect on minds are those which interest the Church most" (*Inter Mirifica*, 1)

. That interest of the Church in the communications media should intensify as the media themselves become ever more pervasive in our society and as they exercise an ever great influence over human minds. You especially, as members, consultors and staff of the Pontifical Commission for Social Communications, must dedicate yourselves - once again in the words of the Second Vatican Council - to this end "that, as with the artistic achievements of former times, the Name of the Lord will be glorified in this new age of technology" (*Ibid.* 24)

. In whatever period of human history the Church has proclaimed the Gospel, whether in this age of technology or in the centuries which gave rise to the great cathedrals and the masterpieces of religious art, it is the same Lord whom we proclaim: "Jesus Christ, yesterday and today and the same forever" (*Hebr.* 13, 8).

In his Name, I now invoke on you, on your loved ones and on your important work the blessing of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

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