



The Holy See

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

Consistory Hall

Friday, 12 March 1993

Dear Brother Bishops,

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. It is a pleasure to receive the members and experts who have come from every continent to take part in the plenary meeting of the *Pontifical Council for Social Communications*. Conscious that in the new evangelization which should prepare the dawn of the Third Christian Millennium "the Church's manifold apostolate regarding instruments of social communication calls for reinforced vigour", (Cfr. *Inter Mirifica*, 18) you are meeting in order to report, to plan and indeed to stimulate worldwide efforts to make the Church more effectively present in the vast world of the communications media. I therefore greet you with warm gratitude and esteem for the expertise and dedication with which you serve the Holy See in this specific task.

2. You have had much to report from this year which has followed the publication of the Pastoral Instruction on Communications, "*Aetatis Novae*". That document was meant to become an instrument of reflection in the hands of the Bishops and of the Catholic communicators of the world. Not only the international Catholic communications organizations but also many Dioceses and Episcopal Conferences have already begun to put it into effect by formulating pastoral plans for communications and by including communications in every pastoral plan. I hope that you will continue your efforts to spread awareness of the need for sound planning in the task of proclaiming the truths and values of the Gospel through the various media.

Your reports also include references to new realities. There are, for example, many new Catholic radio stations in Latin America, in Asia, in Africa and in Europe. There are new Catholic television stations in Europe and in Latin America.

There are many new Catholic publications, especially in Eastern Europe. New efforts are being made to ensure fruitful dialogue with media professionals, including those of the world of entertainment, especially in North America.

Throughout the world - including here in Rome itself - there is an increasing number of centres providing needed formation not only in the techniques of communication but also in that philosophical, theological and spiritual reflection so necessary to sound communication. Communicators who strive through the media to serve the integral well-being, spiritual as well as cultural, of their audiences need an ethical and theological reflection on the way in which they are involved in the work of communications and on the motives for this involvement. In a sense, you yourselves have come together for just such a purpose: to deepen your own realization of the proper place of the media in the Church's saving mission and to help others in the Church to have that same vision.

3. You have also come together to plan: to plan how better to coordinate Catholic communications efforts throughout the world so that they become complementary and not competitive, so that precious resources are used to develop Catholic media, not to duplicate them; to plan how to ensure the right of the Church to proclaim the message of Christ, the truth of the Gospel, through the communications media. In this way you are fulfilling the mandate given to the Pontifical Council for Social Communications: to stimulate worldwide efforts to proclaim the Gospel through the marvellous instruments which man has invented to enhance his capacity for communication. The Church's teaching in this field can become a dead letter if it is not repeated and acted upon, and I am therefore pleased to note that you have published a collection of the principal conciliar and post-conciliar documents on communications: the Decree "Inter Mirifica" and the pastoral Instructions "[Communio et Progressio](#)" and "[Aetatis Novae](#)". It is also encouraging to hear that you will soon be publishing on the thirtieth anniversary of "Inter Mirifica" - a collection of the messages which my predecessor Pope Paul VI and I myself have issued for successive World Communications Days.

4. Among the many items on the agenda of your meeting, you are studying how the Pastoral Instruction "Aetatis Novae" is being implemented and seeing what needs to be done to promote its further application throughout the Church. You have again been looking at such important aspects as the training of Catholic communicators, the promotion of moral standards in advertising, and greater coordination in the field of Catholic radio broadcasting.

The Church's relationship to the media is a complex one and requires constant reflection on your part. On the one hand, the Church sees the means of social communication as having endless potential not only for the diffusion of information, the creation and communication of art and culture, the refreshment and refinement of the human spirit, but also for the spread and strengthening of God's kingdom. At the same time she is painfully aware of the damage which can be inflicted on individuals and society by the misuse of these instruments (Cfr. [Inter Mirifica](#), 1 et

2). In concrete situations, it is the duty of the Church, her pastors and her members to acknowledge and encourage programmes and publications which promote unity, peace, virtue and true brotherly love. Likewise, it can be the duty of the Church and her shepherds, and indeed of all the faithful, to protest against programmes and publications which are morally objectionable and which threaten to violate personal and public integrity and the sanctity of family life. The increasing number of occasions in which Church leaders and communicators meet for fruitful exchange and dialogue can help the members of the Church to understand the media and its special "language" more clearly. It can also help the media to gain a better understanding of the Church and of what she does by word and action to communicate the message and the love of Jesus Christ.

It only remains for me to encourage you in your work and to assure you of the Holy See's gratitude. Through the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, may your efforts to foster an ever better use of the media by the members of the Church bear abundant fruit, so that the world may know the creative, redemptive and sanctifying love of her Divine Son. I invoke upon you and your loved ones God's gifts of strength and joy, and I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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