



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS**

1. This is a significant year for the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, for it marks the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment by my predecessor Pope Pius XII of the Pontifical Commission for Educational and Religious Films. In the years after the Second Vatican Council the Commission served as a clear sign of the Church's increased involvement in the world of social communications and her recognition of the immense influence of the modern media in the life of society. Finally, ten years ago, with the promulgation of the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, the Commission was raised to the status of a Pontifical Council. Each of these steps corresponded not only to the ever greater momentum of the communications revolution, but also to the Church's increasing recognition of the role of the communications media in her mission, as an instrument and as a field of evangelization.

In greeting you, I greet all of those whom you represent, the many who have served over the years on the Pontifical Commission and now the Pontifical Council for Social Communications. With special affection, I greet Cardinal Andrzej Maria Deskur, your President Emeritus, who had a part in much of the history of the Council, and Archbishop John P. Folev, whose dedication you all know.

2. In more recent years, the communications revolution has continued its rapid advance. Today in fact we find ourselves facing an immense challenge, since technology often seems to be moving at such a speed that we can no longer control where it might be leading us. Yet this is also a time of promise, since communications technology can help to break down barriers and create new bonds of community and new kinds of opportunity in a world where human solidarity is the essential way forward. The Church is convinced that modern communications, by enabling a greater flow of information and a greater sense of solidarity between all the members of the human family, can make a significant contribution to the spiritual progress of humanity and thus to the spread of God's Kingdom (cf. *Inter Mirifica*, 2).

In a situation as complex as that of contemporary communications, there is a need for careful discernment and effective education, based always upon the recognition of the priority of ethics over technology, the primacy of the person over things and the superiority of the spiritual over the material (cf. *Redemptor Hominis*, 16.1). Your Plenary Meeting this year has considered the theme of ethics in communications, a matter which becomes increasingly urgent as the influence of the communications media becomes ever more pervasive in the lives of people throughout the world.

The Council's recent document on *Ethics in Advertising* offers a real contribution to this discernment, noting on the one hand the immense potential of advertising in sustaining "honest and ethically responsible competition that contributes to economic growth in the service of authentic human development", while on the other hand calling attention to its possible misuses and their impact on the life of society. It is my hope that this document will prove helpful in promoting reflection and dialogue among professional communicators, aimed at a responsible and constructive contribution to the education of consumers and indeed, the promotion of the common good of society.

3. This year, as the Church reflects on the person and work of the Holy Spirit in preparation for the celebration of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, our thoughts spontaneously turn to the task of the new evangelization which the Spirit both inspires and sustains. Since this evangelization must be "new in method, new in expression and new in zeal" (*Speech to the Nineteenth Plenary Assembly of CELAM*, Port-au-Prince, 9 March 1983), it cannot fail to have recourse to the most up-to-date and effective means of social communication. The saving message entrusted to the Church in order to proclaimed "to the ends of the earth" (*Acts* 1:8) must retain all its freshness and appeal even as it is addressed to every new generation and finds creative expression in every medium.

In this regard, it is a very positive sign that the means of social communication are increasingly being seen as something more than simply instruments to be used. They are themselves a world - "a culture and civilisation" (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 71) - which the Church is also called to evangelize.

The question of the Church's involvement with the world of social communications becomes, therefore, a question of mission which looks to a true inculturation (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 37).

At the same time, the world of social communications is not an isolated sector; while influencing the various cultures, it remains deeply embedded in those cultures. Not only then must the preaching of the Gospel be inculturated in the world of social communications, but in and through that world it must be incarnated in the variety of cultures, ancient and modern, to which a door is being opened by the modern media.

4. To give this witness, all believers in Christ will need a new zeal which can come only from a more ardent faith. In this Year of the Holy Spirit may you be strengthened in your commitment to

make the Pontifical Council of Social Communications an apt instrument of the evangelization which stands at the heart of the Church which is missionary by nature and exists in order to evangelize.

May Mary, Mother of the Church, sustain you in your efforts to communicate Christ to the world. With gratitude for your service to the Gospel, I impart to all of you my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 20 March 1998

JOHN PAUL II