



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE CATHOLIC UNION OF THE ITALIAN PRESS

To Mr Paolo Scandaletti

President of the Catholic Union of the Italian Press

1. The 40th anniversary of the foundation of the Catholic Union of the Italian Press offers me the welcome occasion to extend a cordial greeting to you and to all the members of this association. I willingly express my appreciation for the service that the CUIP renders to evangelization through the efforts of skilled professionals in the vast field of social communications, especially in the press sector.

I am well aware, in this regard, of how careful it is to contribute to spreading Christian values through strong and active networking in newspapers and periodicals. Praise should therefore be given to the Catholic professionals who are its members, for the apostolic concern which inspires their daily work: the courageous witness of faith that each one offers within the mass media sector constitutes a precious service for the protection and promotion of the real good of the person and of the community.

2. The constant development of the means of social communication has a growing influence on people and public opinion and this increases the responsibility of those who are directly involved in the sector, because it induces them to make inspired choices in the search for truth and in serving the common good.

In this regard, it should be stressed that in a large strata of today's society there is a strong desire for good which is not always adequately acknowledged in newspapers and radio-television news bulletins, where the parameters for evaluating events are often marked by commercial rather than by social criteria. There is a tendency to favour "what hits the headlines", what is "sensational", instead of what would help people understand world events better. The danger is the distortion of the truth. To prevent this it is urgent that Christians involved in the information sector work together with all people of good will for greater respect of the truth. By stressing themes such as peace, honesty, life, the family, and by not giving excessive importance to negative facts, they can help establish a new humanism that opens the doors to hope.

As I wrote in the [*Message for the 33rd World Day of Social Communications*](#): "The Church's culture of wisdom can save

the media culture of information from becoming a meaningless accumulation of facts; and the media can help the Church's wisdom to remain alert to the array of new knowledge now emerging" (n. 3). In this perspective, information appears as an increasingly indispensable value constituting a social good to which all its users should be ensured equal access.

3. The digital revolution which characterizes the world of information at the end of the millennium introduces a new way of understanding communications. The paradigms known until now have been changed: no longer are there only *sources* able to spread information and *fields of receivers* to gather messages. A network of interconnected computers makes it possible to hierarchically recognize those who emit messages and those who receive them, with reciprocity of emission. This extraordinary opportunity is endowed with an unprecedented cultural potential, with reflections on the social and political order to the advantage of the poorest and the less well-off. The full scope of its potential, however, may not be expressed, unless the users are offered equal access to other information networks.

The communication flow is capable of breaking down the traditional barriers of time and space by crossing frontiers and avoiding practically every type of censorship. The impossibility of controlling it creates a veritable flood of information which the individual has practically no means of checking. This risks creating a system based on a great mass of information which, at the national and supranational levels, can cause a complete "deregulation", re-creating conditions of superiority and therefore of cultural subjection.

4. A simple appeal to the individual responsibility of those who work in social communications is insufficient to ensure the control of this complex process of change. The commitment of government authorities is necessary. What is necessary in particular is an overall new awareness on the part of users, who must be put in a position where they can refuse their condition as *passive receivers* of the messages that flood their homes, involving their families. The "mass media" often risk becoming a substitute for educational bodies, indicating cultural and behavioural models which are not always positive and to which young people are especially vulnerable. It is therefore essential to provide everyone with suitable cultural instruments for dialogue with the means of social communication, so as to direct their information choices in a positive direction, with respect for man and his conscience.

These problems of great moral importance call for the action of the Church and lay groups at the central level and at territorial, diocesan and parish levels. *The pastoral care of communications* appears increasingly important as a reference point, both for "media" workers and for their users. I therefore encourage you to intensify your apostolic work with awareness of your responsibility in the Church and in society.

5. The 40 years' history of the Catholic Union of the Italian Press show that the laity's involvement, even in this special sector of cultural intervention, must be sought and developed through renewed pastoral awareness. The tradition of Catholic journalism in Italy has had indisputable importance in the formation of generations of believers enlivened by sincere faith. How many journalists have left

a deep mark and how many others continue to work with a spirit of sacrifice and skill in the "media" sector! With regard to the development of the so-called "media culture", the idea, recently re-launched, of a *Committee of media ethics* that would be alert to the possible manipulation of information, fits in with the cultural tradition of the Church's social teaching and confirms the principle that even in the world of social communications not everything that is technically possible is morally lawful.

We are on our way to the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. I know that in preparing for this extraordinary event, under the guidance of the diocesan Bishops you are rereading the Letters of St Paul and are meditating on the most significant passages of Sacred Scripture. This is the way of preparing to enter the new millennium that is most in line with the strong conviction that everyone who works in social communications, when carrying out his mission with seriousness and consciousness, actively takes part in the great plan of salvation which the Jubilee proposes anew in its deepest reality. May the approaching Holy Year reawaken in all this association's members a renewed desire to serve Christ and his kingdom.

With these wishes, I invoke Mary's motherly protection on each one of you and I impart my Apostolic Blessing as a token of abundant heavenly graces to you, Mr President, and indeed to all the members of your praiseworthy association.

From Castel Gandolfo, 22 September 1999.

JOHN PAUL II