



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONFERENCE
FOR THOSE WORKING IN COMMUNICATIONS AND CULTURE
PROMOTED BY THE ITALIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE (CEI)**

Saturday, 9 November 2002

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Brothers and Sisters,*

1. I cordially greet Cardinal Camillo Ruini, President of the Italian Episcopal Conference, and thank him for the kind words that he addressed to me, in the name of all those present. I extend a heartfelt welcome to the Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops, the Minister for Communications, Mr Maurizio Gasparri and those who have participated in this meeting with the people who are involved in communications and culture throughout Italy.

You have reflected on the theme "*Communication and Culture: New Paths for the Evangelization of the Third Millennium*". It is an important basic perspective, that deserves great attention from the entire Christian community.

To you who work in the field of culture and communication, the Church looks with confidence and expectation since, as protagonists of the changes taking place in these sectors in a time of increasing globalization, you are called to interpret the present time and identify ways for communicating the Gospel according to the language and sensibility of the contemporary human person.

2. We are conscious that, especially in the field of social communications, rapid technological transformations are creating new conditions for the transmission of knowledge, for coexistence among peoples, for the formation of lifestyles and mentalities. Communication creates culture, and

culture is transmitted through communication.

But what culture can be created by a communication which is not centred on the dignity of the person, the ability to help deal with the great questions of human life, the duty with honesty to serve the common good, and attention to the problems of a just and peaceful coexistence? Persons are needed in this field who, with the genius of faith, can interpret modern cultural needs, committing themselves to approaching the communications age not as a time of alienation and confusion, but as a valuable time for the quest for the truth and for developing communion between persons and peoples.

3. We must be increasingly aware in the face of this "new Areopagus", shaped largely by the media, that "the very evangelization of modern culture depends to a great extent on the influence of the media" (*Redemptoris missio*, n. 37). We could feel inadequate and unprepared, but nonetheless we must not become discouraged. We know that we are not alone: we are sustained by an unlimited strength which comes from our being with the Lord. Dear workers in communications and culture, if you have assumed this commitment, it is because, like the disciples of Emmaus, you have also recognized the risen Lord in the breaking of the bread and have felt your hearts beating with joy at hearing Him. This is the truest source of cultural renewal. This is the strongest stimulus for a coherent commitment to communication.

We must not tire of fixing our gaze upon Jesus of Nazareth, the Word made flesh, who accomplished the most important communication for the history of humanity allowing us to see through Him the face of the heavenly Father (cf. Jn 14,9) and giving us the Spirit of truth (cf. Jn 16,13) who teaches us all things. Let us once again listen to the teaching of Christ, so that the proliferation of antennas on the rooftops, those emblematic instruments of modern culture, does not paradoxically become the sign of an inability to see and to hear, but is rather the sign of a communication which grows in the service of man and the integral progress of all of humanity.

4. On this path the Church in Italy has embarked on a courageous journey. Already, the Ecclesial Convention in Palermo marked the beginning of an intense pastoral outreach. At the time, I encouraged you to make this time a "time of mission and not of preservation" (23 Nov. 1995). At the time you created a "cultural plan of Christian inspiration" to contribute to creating a vision of life that is inspired by Christian values. The "pastoral orientations" of the Italian bishops for this decade, are characterized by this emphasis, that entails the involvement of both Christian communities and individual believers in order to support them in the work of interpreting the present time, in the quest for plausible life styles and a more effective Christian presence in society. Starting out from this basic choice, many worthwhile initiatives have been launched in the communications field. An important one is the contribution to an original presentation of events and Christian viewpoint offered by the national daily *Avvenire*, currently involved in a major plan of redesigning its pages for its relaunching. No less important are the initiatives that foster many Italian Catholic weeklies.

New opportunities have arisen in the field of television transmission with the satellite TV channel *Sat2000*, and the radio broadcasting network, which brings together many local radio stations. We can only see in this pastoral and cultural leaven a concrete and significant fruit of the Conciliar decree *Inter mirifica*. From this Decree a season of renewal has begun, and even now its suggestions are still valid.

5. The witness of believers finds a vast field of expression in the world of the media and culture. In this sector, special vocations and personal gifts are to be recognized, that the Lord will certainly not allow His Church to be without. Especially, it is the lay faithful who are asked to demonstrate professionalism and authentic Christian consciousness.

Those who work in the media and shape culture, believers and non-believers alike, must have a profound consciousness of their responsibilities, especially with regard to the persons who are the most defenseless, who are often exposed, without protection, to programmes full of violence and distorted visions of the human person, the family, and life. In particular, public authorities and associations for the protection of viewers are called to be active, according to their specific competencies and responsibilities, in order that the media maintain as a high priority their primary goal of service to persons and society. An absence of control and vigilance does not guarantee freedom, as many would like to believe, but instead, ends by fostering an indiscriminate use of very powerful instruments which, if used badly, produce devastating effects on the consciences of individuals and the social life. In a system of increasingly complex communications and global expansion, clear and just rules are also needed which guarantee the pluralism, freedom, participation, and respect of the viewers.

6. Dear workers in communications and culture, before you lies a great challenge: look with faith and hope to the future, using your best energies and trusting in the support of the Lord! I accompany you with my prayer, knowing well, from personal experience, how central the question of culture is to evangelization and how much the media can contribute to a profound cultural renewal enlightened by the Gospel.

May Mary, who welcomed the Word of life, and with the Apostles received the gift of the Spirit in the outpouring of Pentecost, accompany and sustain you, so that you may always proclaim and witness to the Gospel with your lives and your involvement in communications and culture.

To all of you I give my Blessing!