



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF PAUL VI
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE EUROPEAN REGIONAL SEMINARY
OF THE UNITED NATIONS ON FREEDOM OF INFORMATION***

Friday, 17 April 1964

Thank you for leaving your meeting a few moments to come here. You have judged correctly that the theme of your work "freedom of information" could give us the opportunity to reflect usefully with you on what the Church thinks about so serious and current a subject and on the directions that the teaching authority is able to give to those who, like you, are attending to these questions at levels of high responsibility.

It is very evident, although hardly necessary to note it, that due to the evolution of society, the problem of information appears in today's world extremely different from what it was in past centuries. Information henceforth is recognized unanimously as a «universal, inviolable, and inalienable» right of the modern person; it responds to a profound need of human social nature; according to the words even of our revered predecessor Pope John XXIII, in the justly celebrated encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, «Each human being has the right to objective information.»

Since it concerns a right founded in the nature of the human being, obviously proclamation in theory is not enough; we must still acknowledge it in practice, defend and serve it, and guide its exercise so that it remains consistent with its end. It is a right both active and passive: the pursuit of information and the possibility for all to receive it.

Here, the importance of the informant's duty becomes clearly visible: it allows each one, by the information provided, to know situations better and with better knowledge of the facts, to be able to make decisions as a person responsible in solidarity, a member of a human group.

The activities of the informant thus benefit not only individuals but all society. Appealing to the delegates of American enterprises in the press and radio on 21 July 1945, our predecessor Pope Pius XII was not afraid to assert: «It is an invaluable service that your profession renders to

society» (*Discorsi e Radiomessaggi*, VII, 125).

From this goal of information, which is to assist the human being to better undertake its own, destiny and that of the human community, spring forth moral laws: respect for them is the surest guarantee of their healthy practice. Information must be true and honest in fidelity to the event in order to fill its social role, and it will do so only if the informant has a lasting concern for objectivity.

It follows that information must first of all respond to truth. Hence, no one has the right knowingly to spread false information or to present it in a way which distorts comprehension. No one has the right either to choose information in an arbitrary fashion, by spreading only what is in agreement with personal opinions and by keeping silent about the rest; moreover, truth can be offended by deliberate omissions as well as by inaccurate assertions.

It does not suffice that information is objective. Necessarily, information must impose upon itself limits demanded by a higher good; for example, how to respect the rights of others to their good reputation and how to stop before the lawful privacy of their personal lives. How many infractions there are today on these two points. You know it, as we do. Further, information must be respectful of others and of their personal well-being, and even more so perhaps of the common good. Who would dare assert that all information, whatever it may be, is equally beneficial or harmless at all times and in all circumstances? Consider, for example, the sensitive and vulnerable sector that is youth! To do so is to indicate limits which dignity itself demands of information for dissemination, not because of externally and arbitrarily imposed interdicts, but by virtue of the demands of its noble social mission.

These brief notes have shown you what attentive interest we take in the freedom of information and its actual practice.

There could be much yet to say about the professional conscience of informants with regard to public authorities vis-à-vis individuals and about the rights and duties of public authorities in the matter of information and informants.

The Church, as you know, also gives its attention to a slightly different problem, but one which is not unlike the present object of your pursuits: that of religious freedom. That is a question whose importance and scope are such that the Ecumenical Council has taken it up. On this subject, it can rightfully be expected the publication of a text which will be of great import not only for the Church but for all those, and they are innumerable, who will feel affected by an authorized declaration on this topic.

Gentlemen, in closing we offer you our best wishes for a successful conclusion of your Work, on which we petition wholeheartedly, as well as on you and your families, the most generous blessings.

**Paths to Peace* p.84-85.

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