

**MESSAGES OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
FOR WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY
1979 - 2005**

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XIII WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY

- MAY 23, 1979

Social Communications: Protecting in the Child and Promoting His Best Interest in the Family and in Society

Dearest Brothers and Children of the Holy Church,

With the same sentiments of sincere trust and living hope which have marked my pastoral service in the Chair of Peter from its beginning, I turn to you, especially to those among you who are engaged in social communications, on the day which is consecrated to this important subject by the wish of the Second Vatican Council (cfr. Decree *Inter Mirifica*, 18).

The theme for which I wish to claim your attention contains, in fact, an implicit invitation to trust and hope because it deals with childhood, and I discuss it all the more willingly because it was already selected by my beloved predecessor Paul VI. It is opportune to reflect, in this year declared by the United Nations Organization the "Year of the Child", on the particular needs of this vast band of "receivers" - the children - and on the consequent responsibilities of the adults, particularly those who work in communications and who can and do exercise such great influence on the formation - or unfortunately the malformation - of the young generations. Here is contained the seriousness and the complexity of the subject: "Social Communications: protecting the child and promoting his best Interests in the family and in society."

Without making any pretense of examining the subject, or much less, of exhausting the various aspects of it, I wish simply to recall briefly what children have a right to expect and to obtain from the communications media. Enchanted by the instruments of social communication and defenseless against the world and adult persons, they are naturally ready to accept whatever is offered to them, whether good or bad. You, communications professionals, and particularly those of you who work with the audiovisual media, are well aware of this. They are attracted by the "small screen" and by the "large screen", they follow every gesture represented on them, and they perceive, quicker and better than anyone else, the emotions and sentiments which result.

Like soft wax on which every tiniest pressure leaves a mark, so the child is responsive to every stimulus that plays upon his imagination, his emotions, his instincts and his ideas.

Yet the impressions received at this age are the ones which are destined to penetrate most deeply into the psychology of the human being and to condition, often in a lasting way, the successive relationship with himself, with others and with his environment. It was precisely out of an intuition regarding the extreme delicacy of this phase of life that pagan wisdom enunciated the well-known pedagogical guideline which directs that "maxima debetur puero reverentia"; and it is in this same light that we must regard Christ's warning, with its reasoned severity: "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea" (Mt. 18: 6). And certainly among the "little ones" meant by the Gospel, the children especially are included.

For the believer who intends to base the conduct of his own life on the gospel, the example of Christ has to be the norm. Now, it is as one who lovingly welcomes little children that Christ presents himself (cfr. Mk. 10:16), as one who defends them in their spontaneous desire to come close to him (cfr. Mk. 10:14), who praises their typical and trusting simplicity, as being worthy of the kingdom (cfr. Mt. 18:3-4), and who draws our attention to their interior transparency which disposes them so easily to experience God (cfr. Mt. 18:10). He does not hesitate to set down a surprising equation: "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me" (Mt. 18:5). As I had occasion to write recently, "The Lord identifies himself with the world of young children... Jesus does not condition children, he does not use children. He calls them, and brings them into his plan for the salvation of the world" (cfr. Message to the President of the Pontifical Society of Missionary Childhood, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, April 21, 1979).

What then shall be the attitude of responsible Christians and especially of parents and mass media workers conscious of their duties in regard to children? They ought, before all else, to take charge of the human growth of the child; any pretence of maintaining a "neutral" position in his regard and of letting him grow up in his own way merely disguises a dangerous lack of interest under the appearance of respect for the child's personality.

No such disengagement in relation to children can be accepted; for children really have a need for help in their development toward maturity. To be sure, there is a great richness and vitality in a child's heart; however, he is not capable, all by himself, of resolving the diverse mysteries and longings that assail him from within. It is on the adults that the duty falls--on the parents, the educators, the communications workers - and it is they also who have the capability of enabling the child to sort things out and find himself. Does not every child in some way resemble the boy Samuel, of whom the Sacred Scripture speaks? Unable to interpret the call of God, he sought help from his master, who at first replied to him: "No, I did not call you; go back to sleep" (1 Sm. 3:5-6). Now, shall we adopt this kind of attitude and smother the inspirations that impel the child to higher things? Shall we not rather help him to understand and respond, as the priest Eli eventually did with Samuel: "If he calls you again, you shall say: Speak Lord, for your servant is listening" (ibid. 3:9).

There are enormous possibilities and means at the disposal of you adults in this connection. You are in a position to arouse the spirit of the children so that they will listen, or to lull it to sleep and - God forbid! - poison it irremediably. What is required is that you should take such action as will cause the child to avail to the fullest of all the

possibilities for personal realization and thus insert himself creatively into the stream of life in the world; and this thanks to the pains you take to give him an education which dulls none of his promise or talent but brings out the best in him. You especially who are engaged in the mass media, stand by his side and help him in his search for knowledge, giving him cultural and recreational programmes in which he may find an answer to his quest for his identity and for his gradual "entry" into the human community. Then, in your actual programmes, it is important that the child actors should not appear merely in walk - on parts, a diversion to relieve the tired eyes or disenchanted ears of apathetic viewers or listeners, but that they should be allowed to represent characters that can serve as valid models for the younger generation.

I am well aware that in begging you to make this kind of human and "poetic" effort I use "poetic" in its true meaning as the creative capacity proper to art), I am implicitly asking you to relinquish to some extent your adherence to programmes planning geared to instant success and dosely tied to maximum audience "ratings." Is not the true work of art, perhaps, that which is born not from ambition to succeed, but from genuine ability and sure professional maturity? Do not exclude from your productions - I ask this of you as a brother - the opportunity to offer the heart of the children a spiritual and religious invitation; and you may take this as a trusting appeal for your collaboration in the spiritual task of the church.

Similarly I turn to you, parents and educators, and to you, catechists and officials of the various ecclesial Associations, and I urge you to give very serious thought to the problem of the use of the social communications media by and for children, as a matter of capital importance; not only for their enlightened training which, as well as developing their critical sense and teaching them - as you might say - self-discipline in choosing their programmes, helps them along on the human plane, but also for the evolution of the whole society along the lines of uprightness, of truth and of brotherhood.

Dearest brothers and children, childhood is not just any period of human life, which can be isolated from the whole artificially; as a child is flesh of the flesh of his parents, so are all the children a living part of society. It is for this reason that what is at stake in childhood is the fate of the whole of life, of the child's life and of ours, that is, of the life of all. Let us therefore serve childhood, valuing life and choosing "for" life at every level, and let us help childhood, presenting before the eyes and to the vulnerable and sensitive hearts of the little ones the noblest and highest things in life.

Raising the eyes to this ideal, to me it seems that I meet the gaze of the most sweet Mother of Jesus who, totally given to the service of her divine little Son, "kept all these things in her heart" (Lk. 2:51). In the light of her example, I pay honour to the teaching mission which belongs to all of you and, in the confidence that you will carry it out with a love commensurate with its dignity, I bless you from my heart.

XIV WORLD COMMUNICATIONS

DAY - MAY 1, 1980

Social Communications and Family

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

It is in obedience to a direction of the Second Vatican Council that the Catholic Church celebrates (on the 18th of May) the World Day of Social Communications. In one of its first Documents, the Council ordered that a day should be set aside each year in all the dioceses of the world, and that on that special day the faithful should pray for a particular intention, namely, that the Church's work in the field of communications might be effective. In addition, each one was to reflect on his own duties regarding the communications media and to make a contribution for the support of the Church's social communications establishments and undertakings.

In the years since the Council's Decree on the Social Communications Media, the World Day has come to be an increasingly important event in the Church's life. In many countries, Catholics have been joined by the members of other Christian communities in the celebration; a practical manifestation of solidarity admirably in keeping with the ecumenical principle "not to do separately what we can do together". Let us thank God for it.

This year, in harmony with the theme of the coming Synod of Bishops which will be considering the problems confronting the family in the changed circumstances of modern times, we are invited to focus our reflection on the relationship between the mass media and the family. One circumstance which intimately affects all families today is the prevalence of the social communications media: the press, the cinema, the radio, and television. It is a rare home indeed to which entry has not been gained by one or other of these. Where once, not very long ago, the family consisted of parents and children with the addition, perhaps, of a relative or two or a servant, now the circle is, in a sense, extended to admit the more or less permanent "company" of announcers, newsreaders, entertainers, commentators on sport and current affairs, with frequent visits as well from famous and influential people of every nationality, persuasion and profession.

It is a state of affairs with very great potential for good, but also with built in risks that may not be disregarded. The family of today suffers its share of the strong tensions and of the growing disorientation which is affecting modern social life in general. Certain of the stabilizing factors which in the past helped to ensure its solid internal cohesion have now

been diminished or have altogether disappeared. Formerly, there were compelling reciprocal interests and the demands of tasks in which every member had to take part, to keep the family together in almost uninterrupted community throughout the working hours, thus permitting it to play a decisive part in the training and education of the children. In today's altered working conditions, however, the members of the family are often widely separated from each other for the greater part of the day.

The obvious difficulties of this situation can be seriously aggravated by the communications media. If media programmes frequently present a distorted picture of what a family is, or caricature family life, or if they misrepresent or play down the family's function as an educator; members of the family, accepting these distortions passively and uncritically, may quite easily begin to imitate the conduct and adopt the attitudes presented to them notwithstanding its deficiencies or superficiality. It may not occur to them to question the values implied, nor may they have the opportunity or the capacity, even if they do, to challenge the producers or to engage in constructive dialogue with them on the issues. There is the further risk, - it is real and great, - that the family may abdicate the responsibility which rightly belongs to it of shaping the children's attitudes to life and training their sense of values, and may cede it unwittingly to the media.

In this connection, it is wise to be alert to the growing influence which the mass media, and especially television, are exercising on the developing minds of the young, particularly as regards their vision of man, of the world and of relationships with others; for the vision furnished them by the media often differs profoundly from that which the family would wish to transmit to them. Parents, in many cases, do not show sufficient concern about this. Generally, they pay vigilant attention to the type of friends with whom their children associate, but do not exercise a similar vigilance regarding the ideas which the radio, the television, records, papers and comics carry into the "protected" and "safe" intimacy of their homes. And so the mass media often enter the lives of the youngest members of the family with no possibility of the necessary explanations or corrections from parents or other educators which could neutralize any harmful elements and which could equally, employ the many valuable aspects to assist in the process by which children are gradually transformed into well-adjusted men and women.

It is undoubtedly true, on the other hand, that the social communications media can be a most valuable source of cultural enrichment for the family and for each of its members. Well-ordered reading, listening and viewing can contribute greatly to the stimulation of dialogue and interchange within the little community, and can create a broadening of interests which will involve the family in the activities of the larger human family outside. Through the media, a certain participation is also frequently made possible in religious events occurring in distant places, something which is a special comfort to the sick and the housebound in particular. The family's consciousness of the universality of the Church, and its awareness of the problems of all races and peoples becomes more vivid. Thus the media can greatly assist in drawing the hearts of mankind closer together in sympathy, understanding and brotherhood; and the family can acquire a deep and loving "family feeling" for the whole human race. Benefits, these, which should not be underestimated.

But in order that the family may really draw such benefits from its use of the media and at the same time protect itself from any harmful effects, it is necessary that its members, particularly the parents, shall make more active use of their critical faculty. They must take a more searching look at the content of the programmes offered to them. They must exercise judgment on the messages which the media are transmitting to them. Further, the family needs to take a deliberate decision regarding the amount of time it can responsibly afford to spend with the media, taking account of the various other activities and tasks which it must attend to.

In short: it is the duty of parents to educate themselves, and to educate their children, to appreciate the value of communication, to make an intelligent choice between the programmes available to them, and then, having made that choice, to make a reasonable and conscious judgment as to whether the message coming from the program merits to be accepted or rejected. In families where this kind of control is exercised, the media will be less a danger to the wellbeing and proper functioning of the home, but will, on the contrary, be a valuable aid in preparing the gradually maturing younger members to take their place in society.

It is evident that the family needs to be able to count on the good will and integrity, as also on the sense of responsibility, of the media professionals, the publishers, editors, writers, the producers and directors of the broadcasting media, the dramatists, commentators, entertainers, newsmen and women. All these are categories in which the laity are predominant. To all of them men and women, I want to repeat something which I said last year in one of my journeys abroad: "The great forces which shape the world, - politics, the mass media, science, technology, culture, education, industry and work, - are precisely the areas where lay people are specially competent to exercise their mission" (Limerick, October 1, 1979). Undoubtedly, mass media is one of the great forces which is shaping the world at this moment, and it is in the field of mass media that increasing numbers of talented and highly trained people are finding their lifework and vocation. The Church thinks of them today with love and concern and earnestly prays for them all. There are few vocations which make such demands on the energy, the dedication, the integrity and the conscience of a man or woman as are made by a profession in the media. At the same time, and let this not be forgotten, the truly dedicated professional communicator of today can be a force for good in the world which has few parallels.

I earnestly invite all media workers, therefore, to join us in the Church's day of reflection and prayer. We beg the Almighty together to deepen their consciousness of the tremendous opportunity which is theirs to serve mankind and shape the world towards good. We ask Him to endow them with the understanding, wisdom and courage which they will always need in bearing their awesome responsibility. We beg Him to keep them always intensely mindful of their audiences, which for the most part are families like their own, with overworked parents often too tired to be alert, and with children who are trusting, impressionable, vulnerable, easily led. For remembering this, they will keep in mind also the enormous consequences which their work may have for good or ill and will not easily be false to themselves or to the principles of their noble calling.

My special Apostolic Blessing goes today to all mass media workers, to all families, and to all those who search through prayer, reflection and consultation to put the

communications media to the best use for the service of man and the greater glory of God.

XV WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY

- MAY 10, 1981

Social Communications and Responsible Human Freedom

Beloved Brothers and Sisters,

The XV World Communications Day has as its theme: "Social Communications in the service of responsible human freedom". Through this important subject I intend to devote this message, which I address lovingly to the sons of the Catholic Church and to all men of good will.

1. In the continual expansion and progress of the mass media we can discern a sign of the times, which constitutes an immense potential for universal understanding and a strengthening of the grounds for peace and brotherhood among the nations.

Pius XII, of venerable memory, very rightly spoke, in the Encyclical *Miranda Prorsus*, of 8 September 1957, of these media, classifying them as "wonderful inventions of which our age is proud", and seeing in them a gift of God. The *Decree Inter Mirifica* of the II Vatican Ecumenical Council, confirming this view, stressed the possibilities of these media, which "by their very nature are able to reach and move not only individuals, but even multitudes and the whole of human society".

The Church, taking note of the enormous possibilities of the mass media, has always added to this positive evaluation, an appeal to considerations that go beyond enthusiasm, and asks people to reflect and consider what powers of suggestion these media have and will continue to have in their various kinds of influences on man. Of these we must always take full account. Man, even in the presence of the mass media, is called to be himself: that is, free and responsible, a user and not an object, critical and not passive.

2. Repeatedly, in the course of my pastoral ministry, I have spoken of that vision of man as a free person, which is based on divine revelation, and confirmed and demanded as a vital necessity by that same human nature. It is a vision more deeply felt at this time, perhaps as a reaction to the dangers and threats to which men are subjected and respond to with fear.

At the beginning of this year of 1981, in the message for the World Day of Peace, I wished to call attention to freedom as a necessary condition for the pursuit of peace - freedom of individuals, of groups, of families, of peoples, of ethnic, language, or religious minorities.

In truth, it is in freedom that a man becomes his true self. Towards this achievement he must grow, never halting for verbal or rhetorical distractions, as too often happens; nor distorting the meaning of freedom, nor forming a habit perversely as a license for doing whatever pleases him, even if it is evil (cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 17). No, he must see and strictly apply himself, in thought and in action, to the freedom that is his because of his dignity as the creature made in the image of God. This dignity demands that a man make choices informed and free, moved and persuaded by personal conviction and not by blind interior impulse or by mere external pressure (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1.c.). Even a psychological suggestion - apparently harmless - can, when skillfully handled with the tools of persuasion, make a man a target and endanger his freedom. This is the sense in which I mean to speak of social communications as the servant of responsible human freedom. Man is created free. But he is of the kind that must grow and develop by overcoming the self. Freedom has to be won. So a man must free himself from everything that might disqualify him from winning freedom.

3. Now the mass media are here to offer themselves as agents who have a special role in this endeavour to achieve responsible human freedom. It is a context ever present in the mind of the Church. And the question has to be put to the media - can you show that there is a road from your great potential to the achievement of your purpose? Can the mass media, in truth, meet the expectations laid upon them as factors in the achievement among men of responsible freedom?

How do these media support and promote the struggle for human freedom? In fact, they present as reality their own terms of expression. And often this amounts to an imposition of the media view on the man of today, who cannot detach himself or free himself from contacts he feels he needs.

Often, the media are instruments of power that can become oppressive, especially where pluralism is not admitted. This can come about not only where freedom does not exist, as under a dictatorship of whatever brand; but also where freedom is to a degree preserved, but large vested interests bring constant pressure to bear on the media.

This is particularly true of the violation of the right of religious freedom. But it also holds in other situations, where oppression consists of exploiting people.

The responsible freedom of the communicators, who have the power of choosing what they communicate, must take account of the users of their production, who are also free and responsible.

To remind the communicators that their employment demands from them love, justice, truth, as well as freedom - this is a duty of my pastoral ministry. Truth must never be distorted, justice neglected, love forgotten, if one is to observe ethical standards. To forget or lose sight of these is to produce bias, scandal, submission to the powerful, compliance with "reasons of state". The Church will not be the one to suggest adulterating or concealing truth, even a hard truth. The Church, precisely because she is experienced in human nature, does not indulge in an immature optimism; she preaches hope and does not approve of causing scandal.

4. Still: one notes a certain aggressiveness in the information and images of the "mass media": from the field of entertainment to political speeches, from prefabricated and

guided "cultural discoveries" which are nothing but "indoctrination" - to the very field of advertising.

In our world, it is difficult to hypothesize regarding those mass media professionals who have been withdrawn from their own cultural matrix; this, however, must not cause anyone to impose his personal ideology on outside parties. The communicator has to fulfill his task with the maximum objectivity and not turn himself into a "hidden persuader" out of personal interest, for reasons of conformism, or for financial gain.

There is then the danger to the responsible freedom of those who use the means of social communications, a danger which takes the form of a serious attack and is marked by the use of sex to the point where there is an outbreak of pornography: in the spoken or written word, in pictures and even so-called "artistic" posters. At times this is tantamount to pandering, the result of which is both destructive and perverting. The denunciation of this state of affairs does not mean displaying what is so often described as "reactionary mentality" or censorship of free-will: the denunciation is done in the very name of freedom, which demands and necessitates that one does not suffer the imposition of those who seek to transform sexuality into an end in itself. This action would be not only anti-Christian but anti-human, with the consequent transition to drugs, perversion and degeneration.

The intrinsic capacity of the means of social communication offers enormous possibilities. Among these there is the possibility to extol violence through the description and representation of that already appearing in daily newspapers along with consenting words and pictures, which perhaps even pretend to be condemning it! Too often it is something like a "search" tending to excite violent emotions to stimulate the attention, which is often slack.

5. One cannot fail to speak of the effect and influence all this exercises especially on the imagination of the young and of children, unthinking and open to messages and sensations, and great enjoyers of the mass media.

Here is a subject which is still undergoing formation. Its maturation must therefore be aided without artificial traumatization. In this as in other areas, the Church requests responsibility not only from the communicators themselves, but also and in a special way, from the family.

The life style - especially in the more industrialised nations - all too often causes families to abandon their responsibility to educate their children. Evasion of this duty is made easy by the presence of television and of printed materials in the home. These occupy the time for children and young people. No one can deny the justification for this when the means are lacking, to develop and use to advantage the free time of the young and to direct their energies.

The result is that these young people are in most need of help in developing their responsible freedom. There is the duty - especially for believers, for men and women who love freedom, to protect the young from the aggressions they are subjected to by the media. May no one shirk from this duty by using the excuse that he or she is not involved.

6. It must be asked, especially on this day, if pastoral action has achieved all that was asked of it in the uses of mass media!

In fact, it must be remembered that, beyond the document *Communio et Progressio* - whose tenth anniversary it is - much was said at the Synod of Bishops in 1977 and ratified in the Apostolic Constitution *Catechesi Tradendae*. And still more emerged at the Synod of Bishops on the problems of the family, which ended in October 1980.

Theology and pastoral practice, catechetical organization, the schools - especially the Catholic schools - the Catholic associations and groups - what have they done, concretely, on this specific, central matter? Direct action must be intensified in the creation of a critical conscience that will affect the attitudes and behavior not only of Catholics and brother Christians, but of all men and women, adults and young people, to the point where they will truly know, as free and responsible people, how to see, judge and act in the production as well as the choices which the media of social communication make.

The pastoral ministry vested in me, the conciliar outlook I have so often spoken about and encouraged; my personal experience and convictions about humanity, about Christianity and about the role of bishop, all lead me to emphasize the possibilities for good, the richness, the timeliness of the media. I can add that the part of the media work which is labeled artistic does not escape me, but exalts me. But all this cannot hide the fact that - in their use - or abuse, there are those who have the profit, the industry, the means of power.

There are so many aspects to consider in a global evaluation of the media. May they become ever less the instruments of manipulating people. May they become, more and more, promoters of freedom, media of influence, of growth, of maturing the freedom of man.

With these wishes, I am happy to invoke upon all who read these words and seek to understand and share my pastoral care, the fullest heavenly grace, of which my Apostolic Blessing is a pledge.

XVI WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY

- MAY 10, 1982

Social Communications and the Problems of the Elderly

Dearest brothers and sisters in Christ,

For sixteen years now the Church has been holding this "Day" celebration in which the faithful are invited, in response to a specific direction of the conciliar *Decree Inter Mirifica*, to engage in prayerful reflection concerning their personal obligations in the important matter of social communications (cf. *Inter Mirifica*, no. 18). It has been the practice to focus attention on a particular theme for each celebration, while inviting the prayers and offerings of the faithful (idem). In line with this tradition, it has been my wish that the Day should this year be devoted to the Elderly, gladly adopting the theme on which the United Nations Organization has chosen to concentrate in 1982

1. The problems of the elderly today differ considerably from those with which they had to contend in the past. There is, firstly, the fact that the numbers of old people have been steadily increasing; in countries with a high standard of living the increase is accounted for by the improvement in health services and medical care, by better working conditions and general welfare.

Then there are certain factors proper to the modern industrial society, the principal being the alteration in the pattern of the family, which is now generally reduced to a small nucleus, whereas in a peasant society it was a patriarchal grouping. Further, it is often isolated and unstable, sometimes even broken up. Various things have contributed to bring this about, such as the flight from the land and the rush to the cities; and to these may be added in our times the (sometimes immoderate) search for comforts and tendency towards consumerism. In this kind of context, the elderly, often enough, finish by becoming an encumbrance.

And so there come about those conditions that far too often make the lives of the elderly a misery: abject poverty, especially in countries where there are no social security provisions for the old; forced inaction for the pensioners, particularly those who have worked in industry, or who are now very old; desolate loneliness for those deprived of the affection of family or the company of friends. Then, as the years pass and their strength fails and illness comes to debilitate them further, they are made to feel increasingly conscious of their physical fragility and, above all, of the burden of life.

Concern of humanity

2. There can be no adequate solution to these problems unless they are taken to heart by everybody and accepted as a matter with which the whole of humanity must concern itself; for all humanity is called upon to support and care for the elderly, because of the dignity of each and every human being and because of the significance of human life which "is a gift, always.

The Sacred Scripture, which speaks frequently about the old, considers old age as a gift which renews itself and which ought to be lived each day in openness to God and to the neighbour.

In the Old Testament, the old person is regarded as a master of life: "How attractive is wisdom in the aged! Rich experience is the crown of the aged, and their boast is the fear of the Lord" (*Sir* 25: 5-6). What is more, the old have another important task: to pass on the word of God, to the new generations: "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what deeds thou didst perform in their days" (*Ps* 44:1). Announcing to the young their own faith in God, they preserve a fecundity of the spirit which suffers no decline with the weakening of their physical powers: "They still bring forth fruit in old age, they are ever full of sap and green, to show that the Lord is upright" (*Ps* 92: 1-15). For these tasks of the aged there are corresponding duties for the young. They must listen to them: "Do not disregard the discourse of the aged (*Sir* 8:9), ask your father, and he will show you; your elders, and they will tell you" (*Deut* 32:7); and they must assist them: "Help your father in his old age, and do not grieve him as long as he lives; even if he is lacking in understanding, show forbearance; in all your strength do not despise him" (*Sir* 3: 12-13).

No less rich is the teaching of the New Testament, where St. Paul gives "evangelical" counsels for an ideal of life in old age, prescribing sobriety, dignity, judiciousness, soundness in the faith, in love and patience (cf *Tit* 2: 2). A very striking example is given by the old man Simeon, who lived in the hope and expectation of meeting the Messiah, and for whom the Christ became the fullness of life and the hope of the future. Having prepared himself in faith and humility, he was able to recognize the Lord, and joyfully sang, not a farewell to life, but a hymn of thanks to the Saviour of the world, on the threshold of eternity (cf. *Lk* 2: 25-32).

Dispensers of wisdom and hope

3. Precisely because old age is a time of life which needs to fulfill itself in active and loving engagement, adequate prominence and help should be given to all those "Movements" which assist the elderly to emerge from an attitude of mistrust, solitude and resignation, and to become rather dispensers of wisdom, witnesses of hope and workers of charity.

It is within the family that the elderly ought to find their first field of action. Their wisdom and experience are a treasure for the young married folk who, in the difficulties of early married life, can find in aged parents agreeable counsellors and confidants, while the children will find in the example and affectionate care of their grandparents something which will compensate for the absences of the parents, which, for various reasons, are so frequent today.

And this is not all: in the civil society itself, which has always entrusted the stable organization of its social arrangements, as well as the progress of necessary reforms, to mature persons, the elderly can still provide a stabilizing factor in working out the kind of co-existence that achieves renewal and advance, not by means of ruinous experiences, but by prudent and gradual development.

Mass media can form attitudes

4. Workers in the social communications profession have a mission to fulfill in favour of the elderly which is ever so important; I should say, in fact, there is nothing else which can substitute for it. The media instruments in their hands, with their worldwide range of action and with their immediacy in getting messages across, can quickly and eloquently concentrate general attention and excite general reflection on the elderly and on their conditions of life. It is only when it is jerked into awareness, given a salutary shock, and then mobilized into taking appropriate action, that society can go about seeking ways and means to give effective solutions to the new needs.

Another contribution from the communications fraternity will be to correct among the young certain modes of thinking regarding the old, restoring to those of mature years and to the old a confidence of their own usefulness, and re-modelling the attitudes of society so that it will see the elderly at their true value. It is also in their power to give opportune reminders to public opinion that, alongside the problem of a "just wage", there also exists the problem of a "just pension" which equally requires attention as a demand of "social justice".

The fact is that modern cultural patterns in which an unbalanced emphasis is often given to economic productivity, efficiency, physical strength and beauty, personal comfort can have the effect of making the elderly seem burdensome, superfluous and useless, and of emarginating them from family and social life. A careful examination reveals that part of the responsibility for this situation may be attributed to certain attitudes of the mass media: if it is true that the media reflect the society in which they operate, it is no less true that they contribute to making it the sort of society which it is, and therefore, cannot be exempted from taking their share of the responsibility.

Media people are particularly well qualified to communicate widely a vision of the old, as outlined above, which is genuinely human and therefore also Christian: a vision of old age as a gift of God to the individual, to the family and to society. Authors, writers, producers, actors, can succeed, through the wonderful ways of the arts, in making such a vision understandable and attractive. All of us know the success they have achieved in other campaigns, conducted with finesse and perseverance.

Culture and prayer

5. These human and Christian attitudes, broadcast widely by the mass-media, will help the elderly to look upon this period of their life with serenity and acceptance, and to employ their intellectual, moral and physical energies, to whatever extent is possible, for the benefit of others, giving what help they can in projects of a humanitarian, educational, social or religious character; also to fill their long silences by means of culture and prayer. Their children will be persuaded that the ideal dwelling place for the elderly is

within the family, or at least a place where they can be surrounded by the affection of its members, and made to feel sincerely accepted and loved and cared for.

The civil society, meanwhile, will be stimulated to adopt adequate systems of social security and assistance, which will take account not only of physical and material needs but also of those which are psychological and spiritual, so as to integrate the elderly once and for all into the community's benefits and allow them a full life. Generous persons will feel themselves called upon to give their time and energies to this cause, having recognized Christ Himself in their needy brother.

Beyond this work of animation the media workers, well aware that the elderly form a large and stable proportion of their public, especially as readers and users of radio and television, will take care to see that there are programmes and publications suitable for them, thus offering them not only recreational material, but also an assistance in their continuing education, a thing that is required at every age. Communicators will merit the special gratitude of the housebound and the sick for making it possible for them to participate with the People of God in liturgical services and other Church events.

In such transmissions it will naturally be necessary to keep in mind the needs and special sensibilities of the old, avoiding novelties which may upset them and showing respect for the sense of the sacred which old people possess in large measure and which constitutes in the Church a good which is worth preserving intact.

Serving a noble cause

6. Let the elderly themselves be the first, on this World Communications Day specially devoted to their problems, to offer their prayers and sacrifices to the Lord that the Christian vision of old age may grow in the world.

As for those who are still in their childhood, those still in the vigour, may they look upon their elders with of their youth and the middleaged, loving respect and gratitude.

May the communications people find joy and happiness in serving this noble and deserving cause with their wonderful talents and resources.

And may the Lord bless and sustain them all in their resolve.

With this wish, I gladly give my Apostolic Blessing to all those who work in the field of social communications, to all those who are responsible beneficiaries of their services, and especially to the elderly. May it bring them copious gifts of tranquil joy and spiritual progress.

XVII WORLD COMMUNICATIONS

DAY - MARCH 25, 1983

Social Communications and the Promotion of Peace

Dearest brothers and sisters in Christ,

1. The promotion of peace: this is the theme proposed for your reflection on the World Day of Social communications in the present year. A theme of extreme importance and of vibrating topicality.

In a world whose various elements have become ever more interdependent, thanks to the spectacular progress and rapid expansion of the mass media, communication and information today represent a force which can very powerfully serve the great and noble cause of peace, but which can equally aggravate tensions and favour new forms of injustice and of violations of human rights.

Fully conscious of the role of those engaged in social communications, I believed it to be necessary, in my recent *Message for the World Day of Peace* (1st January 1983) which was on the theme: "The dialogue for Peace, a challenge for our time", to address a special appeal to all who work in the mass media encouraging them to weigh well their responsibility and to put forward with fullest objectivity the rights, problems and mentalities of the two sides, so as to promote understanding and dialogue between groups, countries and civilizations (cfr. n. II).

In what way can social communication promote peace?

2. First of all, through the establishment on the institutional plane of an order of communication that guarantees a correct, just and constructive use of information, free from oppression, abuses and discriminations based on political, economic or ideological power. It is not the intention here in the first place to think of new technical applications, but rather to re-think the fundamental principles and the aims which must be given precedence in social communication, in a world which has become like a single family and where a legitimate pluralism ought to be assured on a common basis of consensus about the essential values of human coexistence. To achieve this, an erudite maturing of conscience is required on the part of both the communications workers and their audiences; and enlightened, upright and courageous choices have to be made by public authorities, by society at large and by the international institutions. A right order of social communication and an equal participation in its benefits, in full respect for the rights of all, create an environment and conditions favourable for a mutually enriching dialogue

between citizens, peoples and the different cultures, while injustices and disorders in this area favour situations of conflict. Thus, one-way information imposed arbitrarily from on high, or from the laws of the market and of advertising; concentration in monopolies; manipulation of whatever kind; not only are such things attacks upon the right order of social communication, but they also finish by injuring the rights to responsible information and by endangering peace.

3. Secondly, communication promotes peace when in its content it educates constructively in the spirit of peace. Closely considered, information is not ever neutral; it corresponds always, at least implicitly and in its intentions, to chosen stances. Communication and education to values are intimately linked. Cleverly placed emphasis, slanted interpretation, even loaded silences, are devices which can profoundly alter the significance of what is being communicated. So, the form and manner in which situations and problems are presented,- such matters as development, human rights, relations between peoples, ideological conflicts, social and political differences, national claims, the arms race, to give but a few instances,- directly or indirectly influence the formation of public opinion and create mentalities which are either inclined towards peace or, on the contrary, towards seeking solutions through the use of force.

If it is to be an instrument of peace, social communication will have to rise above unilateral and partisan considerations, shake itself free from prejudices, and create instead a spirit of understanding and reciprocal solidarity. The faithful acceptance of the logic of peaceful co-existence among diverse elements requires the constant application of the method of dialogue which, while recognising the right to existence and to expression of all the parties concerned, affirms also the obligation which each has to integrate itself with all the others, in order to achieve that higher good, which is peace; and to peace there is opposed today, as a dramatic alternative, the threat of the atomic destruction of human civilization.

Consequently, it becomes today all the more necessary and all the more urgent to put forward the values of a total humanism, founded on recognition of the true dignity and of the rights of man, open to cultural solidarity, as well as to social and economic solidarity among persons, groups and nations, in the consciousness that all humanity has the same vocation in common.

4. Social communication, finally, promotes peace if the professionals of information are workers for peace.

The peculiar responsibility and unavoidable task which falls to the lot of communicators in regard to peace can be deduced from a consideration of the capacity and power which are theirs to influence, sometimes in a decisive way, both public opinion and the attitudes of those in government.

To the communications operatives, there should certainly be accorded, for the exercise of their important functions, fundamental rights, such as access to the sources of information and freedom to present the facts objectively.

But, on the other hand, it is also necessary that the communications workers should rise above the demands of an ethic which is conceived merely as relating to the individual, and that, above all, they should not let themselves be enslaved to power groups, whether

these are clearly recognisable as such, or in disguise. They ought instead to keep in mind that, above and beyond their contractual obligations to the organs of information, and their legal responsibilities, they also have precise duties regarding the truth, towards the public, and relating to the common good of society.

If in the exercise of their task, which is truly a mission, the social communicators contrive to promote calm and impartial information, to favour understanding and dialogue, to strengthen comprehension and solidarity, they will have made a magnificent contribution to the cause of peace.

I confide to you, dearest brothers and sisters, these considerations of mine, now, exactly at the beginning of the Extraordinary Holy Year, with which we intend to celebrate the 1950th anniversary of the Redemption of mankind, achieved by Jesus Christ, "the Prince of Peace" (cfr. *Is.* 9, 6), Who is "our peace" and Who is come "to announce peace" (cfr. *Eph.* 2: 14,17).

While I invoke on you on the workers in social communications the divine gift of peace, which is a "fruit of the Spirit" (cfr. *Gal.* 5, 22), I give you from my heart my Apostolic Blessing.

XVIII WORLD COMMUNICATIONS

DAY - MAY 24, 1984

Instruments of Encounter between Faith and Culture

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. Desired by the Second Vatican Council to "make the Church's multiple apostolate in the field of social communication more effective" (*Decree Inter Mirifica*, no. 18), this annual Day, which is being celebrated for the eighteenth time, has the scope of ever better educating the faithful in their duties in such an important sector. On this occasion, in the first place I Wish to exhort each of you to join me in prayer that the world of social communication, with its operators and multitude of receivers, may faithfully carry out its function in the service of truth, freedom and the promotion of the whole man in all people.

The theme chosen for this eighteenth day is of great importance:

Social Communications, Instrument of Encounter between Faith and Culture. Culture, faith and communication are three realities among which a relationship is established on which depend the present and the future of our civilization, which is called to express itself ever more fully in its planetary dimension.

2. Culture, as I had the opportunity to say earlier (cf. *Discourse to UNESCO*, 2 June 1980, is a specific dimension of the existence and being of man. It creates among the persons within each community a complex of bonds, determining the interpersonal and social character of human existence. Man is both subject and creator of culture in which he expresses himself and finds his equilibrium.

Faith is the meeting between God and man: to God, who in history reveals and realizes his plan of salvation, man responds through faith, receiving and making his own this plan, directing his life to this message (cf. *Rm* 10:9, *2 Cor* 4:13). Faith is a gift from God to which man's resolve must correspond.

But if culture is the specifically human way to approach ever more to being and if, on the other hand, in faith man opens himself to knowledge of the Supreme Being in whose image and likeness he was created (cf. *Gen* 1:26), there is no one who does not see what a profound relationship there is between one and the other human experience. One understands, then, why the Second Vatican Council wanted to emphasize the "outstanding incentives and encouragements" which the mystery of Christian faith offers

to man that he may fulfill with greater commitment the task of building up a more human world, that is, one corresponding to his "total vocation" (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 57).

And further: culture in itself is communication: communication not only and not so much of man with the environment that he is called to dominate (cf. *Gn* 2:19-20, 1:28) as of man with other men. Indeed, culture is a relational and social dimension of human existence. Enlightened by faith, it expresses also man's full communication with God in Christ and, upon contact with the truths revealed by God, more easily finds the foundation of the human truths which foster the common good.

3. Faith and culture, therefore, are called to meet and to interact precisely in the sphere of communications: the effective achievement of the meeting and interaction, as well as their intensity and effectiveness, in large measure depends on the suitability of the media through which communication takes place. The press, cinema, the theater, radio, television, with the evolution which each of these media has undergone during the course of history, have proved to be not always adequate to the encounter between faith and culture. The culture of our time particularly seems to be dominated and shaped by the newest and most powerful among the means of communication - radio and, above all, television - so much so that at times they seem to assert themselves as ends and not as simple means, also because of the characteristics of organization and structure which they require.

Nevertheless, this aspect of modern mass-media must not make us forget that it is a question always, of means of communication and that this, by its nature, is always the communication of something. The content of the communication is therefore always determinant, and such, indeed, as to qualify the communication itself. Hence, with regard to the contents, the sense of responsibility of the communicators as well as the critical sense of the receivers must always be stressed.

4. Certain disappointing aspects of the use of the modern mass media must not make us forget that with their contents they can become marvellous instruments for the spread of the Gospel, suitable to the times, capable of reaching the remotest corners of the earth. In particular, they can be of great help in catechesis, as I pointed out in the Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* (no. 46).

May those who use the means of social communication for the purposes of evangelization - contributing also to building up in this way a cultural fabric in which man, aware of his relationship with God, becomes more man - be therefore aware of their lofty mission. May they have the necessary professional competence and may they feel the responsibility of transmitting the Gospel message in its purity and totality, without confusing the divine doctrine with men's opinions. Indeed, the mass media, whether they deal with news or concern themselves with precisely cultural topics, or whether they are used for the purpose of artistic expression and entertainment, always return to a particular concept of man; and it is precisely on the basis of the exactness and completeness of this concept that they will be judged.

At this point my appeal becomes stronger and is addressed to all workers in the field of social communications, in whatever location and of whatever religion:

--Operators of communications, do not give an incomplete, distorted picture of man, one closed to authentic human values!

--Give space to the transcendent, which makes man more man!

--Do not deride religious values, do not ignore them, do not interpret them according to ideological schemes!

--May your information be always inspired by criteria of truth and justice; may you feel the duty to rectify and remedy when you happen to make an error.

--Do not corrupt society, and in particular youth, by the approving and insistent depiction of evil, of violence, of moral abjection, carrying out a work of ideological manipulation, sowing discord!

--All you who work in the mass media, know that your messages reach a mass that is such because of the number of its members, each of whom, however, is man, a person concrete and unique, who must be recognized and respected as such. Woe to anyone who will have given scandal, especially to the little ones! (cf. *Mt.* 18:6).

--In short, commit yourselves to fostering a culture which is truly to man's standard, aware that by doing this you will facilitate the encounter with faith, which no one must fear.

5. Unfortunately, a realistic examination leads us to recognize that in our time the immense potentials of the mass media are very often used against man, and that the prevailing culture disregards the encounter with faith, both in countries in which the free circulation of ideas is permitted and also in places where freedom of expression is confused with irresponsible license. It is the task of everyone to improve the field of social communication and to lead it back to its noble aims. May communicators adhere to the rules of a correct professional ethic. May critics carry out their useful clarifying action, fostering the formation of the critical awareness of the receivers. May the receivers themselves know how to choose with prudent care books, newspapers, films, plays and television programmes in order to derive from them occasions of growth and not corruption. Furthermore, also through suitable associated forms, may they make their voice heard by the operators of the communication that it may always be respectful of man's dignity and his inalienable rights. And, with the words of the Second Vatican Council, I point out that the "civil authorities, which rightly regard the well-being of the citizens as their concern, are also bound to ensure, equitably and vigilantly, that public morality and social progress are not gravely endangered through the misuse of these media" (*Inter Mirifica*, no. 12).

6. Indeed, since at the beginning of communication there is a man-communicator and, at its end, there is a man-receiver, the media of social communication will facilitate the encounter between faith and culture the more they foster the encounter of persons among themselves, so that a mass of isolated individuals will not be formed, each one of whom may be in dialogue with the written page, or the stage, or the small or large screen, but a community of persons aware of the importance of the meeting with faith and with culture and determined to achieve it through personal contact, in the family, in the place of employment, in social relations. May culture and faith, which find useful and often indispensable direct or indirect aids in the mass media, circulate in the dialogue between

parents and children, become enriched through the work of teachers and educators, develop through direct pastoral action, up to the personal encounter with Christ present in the Church and in his sacraments.

With the intercession of Mary Most Holy, I invoke on the workers in the field of communications and on the vast community of receivers the heavenly favours of which my Apostolic Blessing is pledge, that each one in his own role may commit himself to ensure that social communications be an ever more effective means of encounter between faith and culture.

XIX WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY

- APRIL 15, 1985

Social Communications for a Christian Promotion of Youth

My dearest brothers and sisters in Christ, men and women who have at heart the dignity of the human person, and, above all, you young people of the whole world, who have to write a new page of history for the year 2000!

1. The Church is getting ready, as it does every year, to celebrate World Communications Day. An occasion of prayers and reflection, in which the whole Church community, called to announce and witness to the Gospel (*Mk 16:15*), ought to feel involved, so that the mass media, through the cooperation of all persons of good will, may truly contribute to "the realization of justice, of peace, of freedom and of human progress" (*Communio et Progressio*, 100).

The theme of the world Day - "Social communications for a Christian promotion of youth" - echoes the initiative of the United Nations, which has proclaimed 1985 as the "International Year of Youth". The instruments of social communication, which are "capable of extending almost infinitely the area over which it is possible to make the word of God heard" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 45), can effectively contribute towards young people's realization of their personal vocation as persons and as Christians, through a free and responsible choice, thus preparing them to be the builders and leaders of tomorrow's society.

Instruments for the service of humanity

2. The Church, in its teaching of the Second Vatican Council the twentieth anniversary of its closing is celebrated this year - and in its subsequent teaching, has clearly acknowledged the great importance of the mass media in the development of the human person: from the point of view of information, of education and training, of cultural maturation, as well as of leisure time occupation and entertainment. The Church has also, however, pointed out that the media are instruments for the service of humanity and of the common good; means, that is, not ends.

The world of social Communications is engaged today in a development which is dizzying in its extreme complexity, a development whose ultimate unfolding cannot be foreseen (we talk nowadays of a technotronic age, to indicate the growing interaction between technology and electronics); and in this complex world we encounter not a few problems, connected with the elaboration of a new world order of information and

communication, in interplay with the prospects opened up by the employment of satellites and the conquest of space.

We are speaking of a revolution which not only implies a change in the systems and techniques of communication, but involves the whole cultural, social and spiritual universe of the human person. In consequence, it cannot respond simply to its own internal norms, but must draw its own basic criteria from the truth of and about the human person, formed in the image of God.

According to the right to information which every person has, communication must always respond in its content to the truth, and out of respect for justice and charity it ought to be complete. With all the greater reason, this holds true when the communication is addressed to young people, who are in the position of opening themselves to the experiences of life. Above all in this case, information cannot remain indifferent to values which touch human existence down to the roots, such as the primacy of life from the moment of its conception, the moral and spiritual dimension, peace, and justice. Information cannot be neutral in face of problems and situations which on the national and international levels damage the connective fabric of society, such as war, violation of human rights, poverty, violence, drugs.

Challenges to social communications

3. From all time, the destiny of man has been decided in the confrontation of the truth, in the choice which he, in virtue of the freedom conferred on him by his Creator, makes between good and evil between the light and the darkness. But it is a striking and painful thing to see today an ever growing number of men blocked from the free exercise of this choice: because they are subjugated by authoritarian regimes, suffocated by ideological systems, manipulated by a totalitarian science and technique, conditioned by the mechanism of a society which generates ever increasing depersonalization.

Liberty seems the great challenge which social communication must confront, to achieve the conquest of enough space for sufficient autonomy, right there where it must at present submit to the censorship of totalitarian regimes, or to the impositions of powerful cultural economic or political pressure groups.

The mass media, as elements of unity and advancement, must overcome ideological and political barriers, walking with humanity in its march towards peace, and assisting the process of integration and fraternal solidarity among peoples, in two directions, East-West and North-South. As vehicles of education and culture, the mass media must contribute to the renewal of society and, in particular, to the human and moral development of young people, focusing their awareness on the historic tasks which await them on the threshold of the third millennium. With this end in mind, the mass media ought to open to youth new horizons, educating them to a sense of duty, to honesty, to respect for their peers, to a sense of justice, to friendship, to study, to work.

Immense potential for good

4. These considerations bring into clear relief the immense potential for good which the instruments of social communication have in their power to set free. But at the same time they leave us to imagine the grave threats which the mass media can hold over society - if bent to the purposes of power or self-interest, or if used with the intention of

distortion, against the truth, against the dignity of the human person or his freedom: and, worst of all, against the weakest and most defenseless.

The newspaper, the book, the record, the film, the radio, and the television in particular, and the ever more sophisticated computer, these already represent an important point of contact, even if not the only one, between the young person and the external reality within which his daily life is lived. And the young person has recourse to the mass media with increasing frequency, either because he now has more spare time, or because the frantic rush of modern life causes him to seek more frequent escape in recreation. Then, the absence of both parents, when the mother as well as the father has to work outside the home, occasions a slackening in the traditional control over the use which is made of the media.

Young people, therefore, are the first and most immediate receivers of the mass media, but they are also the most exposed to the flood of information and of images which arrive in the house by means of the media. Furthermore, it is not possible to ignore the danger of certain messages, transmitted even during the hours when youth listening and viewing is at its peak, slipped in under cover of ever more explicit and aggressive advertising, or introduced in shows which give the impression that the life of man is regulated only by the laws of sex and violence.

The term "videodependence" is already in common use to describe the ever mightier influence that the instruments of social communication, with their capacity for suggestion and modernity, have upon the young people. There is need to examine this phenomenon very thoroughly, to verify its real consequences on receivers who have not yet developed a sufficiently mature critical sense. It is not merely a question of conditioning free time, that is, of limiting the amount of time available each day for other intellectual and recreational activities, but there is also question of the effects upon the very psychology, the culture, the behaviour of youth.

The education imparted by the traditional teachers, particularly the parents, was achieved by a fundamental interpersonal relationship which permitted the two-way flow of dialogue; this tends now to be replaced by a one-way education. In place of a culture laid down upon a value-content framework, on the quality of the information, there thus enters a culture of the temporary which favours the rejection of long term commitments, with a culture so overpowering that it induces a flight from the making of free personal choices. For a training directed towards encouraging the growth of a sense of responsibility, individual and collective, there is substituted an attitude of passive acceptance towards the fashions and the needs imposed by a materialism which while stimulating consumption of goods, empties the conscience. The imagination, which is the very property of our early years, the expression of youth's creativity, of its impulsive generosity, dries up in the glut of images absorbed so effortlessly, and a habit of indolence is formed which quenches stimuli and desires, and smothers any impulse to undertake new tasks or projects.

Demanding task

5. It is a situation which, if it is not to become more widespread, must surely persuade those who work in social communications to reflect very seriously and very deeply. They have an uplifting task, but one which is at the same time tremendously demanding: on the

use which they make of their resources of talent and expertise depend in large measure the training and education of the people who, tomorrow, must achieve the betterment of this society of ours, impoverished in its human and spiritual values and threatened with self-destruction.

Parents and educators have an even more demanding task. The witness they give, supported by conduct which is culturally and morally consistent, may in fact very well be the most efficacious and credible teaching the young can receive. Dialogue, critical discernment, vigilance, these are the conditions which are indispensable when educating the young person to behave responsibly in the use of mass media, re-establishing in him or her the right balance whenever there has been a negative impact from these instruments.

The International Year of Youth, even in this area, makes demands Upon the world of adults. It is a duty upon all to help the young enter society as responsible citizens, well-rounded people, conscious of their own dignity.

Church's mission

6. It is here precisely that the 19th World Communications Day takes on its full significance. The theme of this forthcoming celebration goes right to the heart of the Church's mission, for the Church must bring salvation to all men, preaching the Gospel "from the housetops" (*Mt* 10:27; *Lk* 12:3). Great possibilities are offered today to social communications, in which the Church recognizes the sign of God's creative and redemptive work, the work which man must continue. These instruments can therefore become powerful channels for the transmission of the Gospel, on the level of pre-evangelization, and on that of the deepening of faith, to favour the human and Christian promotion of youth.

This evidently calls for:

--profound educational activity, in the family, in the school, in the parish, through the catechism, to instruct and guide the young to a balanced and disciplined use of the mass media, helping them to form a critical judgment, illumined by faith, on what they see, hear and read. (*Inter Mirifica* 10, 16; *Communio et Progressio* 67-70, 107);

--careful and specific practical and theoretical training in the seminaries, in apostolic associations of laity, in the new ecclesial movements - especially youth movements, not only to secure an adequate acquaintance with the instruments of social communication, but also to realize their undoubted potential for strengthening dialogue in charity and reinforcing the bonds of unity (*CP* 108, 110, 115-117);

--the active and coherent presence of Christians in all the sectors of social communication, bringing not only the contribution of their cultural and professional expertise, but also the living witness of their faith (*CP*, 103);

--the engagement of the Catholic community, so that, when the need arises, it will denounce shows and programmes which assault the moral good of the young, state its claim for more truthful information about the Church, and demand transmissions more positively inspired by the authentic values of life (*IM* 14);

--the presentation of the Gospel message in its integrity: taking trouble not to betray it, not to trivialize it, not to reduce it, with intent, to a merely socio-political vision; but also, after the example of Christ the perfect communicator, adapting it to the receivers, to the mentality of young people, to their manner of speaking, to their state and condition (*Catechesi Tradendae*, 35, 39, 40).

Especially youth

7. And it is to the youth in particular that I wish to address myself at the conclusion of this Message: to the young people who have already encountered Christ, to those who have come to Rome at the beginning of Holy Week, in spiritual unity with millions of their age group, to proclaim with the Pope that "Christ is our peace" but also to all young people who, even in a confused way, amid uncertainties, anguish and mistakes, aspire to encounter this "Jesus who is called Christ" (*Mt* 1:16), to give a meaning and a purpose to their life.

Dearest young people! Up to now, I have addressed myself to the world of adults. But in reality, it is to you in particular that I wish to send this Message. The importance and the ultimate meaning of the instruments of social communication depend, definitively, on the use which human freedom makes of them. It will, therefore, depend on you, on the use you make of them, on the critical judgment with which you know how to use them, whether these instruments are going to serve your human and Christian formation, whether, on the contrary, they are going to be turned against you, suffocating your liberty and putting an end to your thirst for authenticity.

It will depend on you, young people, for to you it falls to construct the society of tomorrow, in which the intensified flow of information and of communications will multiply the forms of association among men, and technological development will hammer on the barriers that separate men and nations. It will depend on you whether the new society is going to be one sole human family, where men and peoples can live in closest collaboration, fully integrated, or whether in the society of the future the conflicts and divisions which afflict the world today are simply going to be more bitter.

In the words of the Apostle Peter, I repeat the wish which was expressed in my *Letter to the young men and women of the world*: that you may "always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have" (*1 Pet* 3:15).

"Yes, you your very selves, for on you depends the future, on you depend what are left of the thousand years now ending and the quality of the opening years of the new millennium. Therefore, don't be passive; take over your responsibilities in every field open to you in our world"! (n. 16).

Search for truth

Dearest young people! The invitation I offer you to responsibility, to engagement, is first of all an invitation to search for "the truth that will make you free" (*Jn* 8:32), and the truth is Christ (cf. *Jn* 14:6). And so it is an invitation to place the truth of Christ at the center of your life to give witness to this truth in the story of your daily life, in the decisive choices you have to make, in order to help humanity set its feet firmly on the path of peace and of justice.

With these sentiments I impart to all my Apostolic Blessing, praying that you may be enlightened from heaven.

XX WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY

- JANUARY 24, 1986

Social Communications and the Christian Formation of Public Opinion

Dear brothers and sisters,

1. The recent Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, did not set out merely to be a solemn commemoration of that event, which was destined to mark so deeply the life of the Church in this century; more importantly, it brought the Council's spirit to life again and recalled anew its teachings and decisions. Thus, the Synod took the Second Vatican Council and relaunched it into the Church's life.

Among the initiatives given birth by a directive of the Council there is one which is worthy of special mention. It is the annual World Communications Day, established in the first place "to strengthen more effectively the various forms of the Church's apostolate in the field of communications in all the dioceses of the world" (*Inter Mirifica*, 18). The decision to establish it, which shows what great importance the Council Fathers attributed to social communications, is seen to have even greater relevance today, with the ever growing influence of the communications media.

The Church which, this year for the twentieth time, in faithful obedience to the Council, celebrates World Communications Day, has been accustomed to assign a particular theme to each successive celebration. This year, the "Day" is to be dedicated to considering, in depth, what contribution social communications can make to the Christian formation of public opinion.

This is not the first time that the Church has turned its attention to this theme. "The Church does not speak and listen to her own members alone", said the Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio*, in 1971; "her dialogue is with the whole world. By virtue of a divine command and by the right to knowledge possessed by the people whose lot she shares on earth, the Church is in duty bound publicly to communicate her belief and her way of life" (n. 122).

Morally healthy public opinion

2. Paul VI, in his turn, wrote in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: "In our age which is characterized by the mass media, we must not fail to avail ourselves of the media for the first proclamation of the message, for catechetical instruction and for a deeper study of the faith. These, when they are employed in the service of the gospel, can disseminate the word of God over a vast area and carry the message of salvation to millions of men. The Church would feel herself guilty before God if she did not avail herself of those powerful instruments which human skill is constantly developing and perfecting. With their aid she may preach 'upon the housetops' the message which has been entrusted to her. In them she finds in a new and more effective form a platform or pulpit from which she may address the multitudes" (n. 45).

"Public opinion" consists in the common and collective way of thinking and feeling which is found in a fairly large social group at a particular time in a particular place. It is the indicator regarding what the body of the people think about a subject, or a fact, or a problem of some importance. Public opinion is formed by the fact that a large number of people do, because it seems to them right and proper, just what some persons or groups who have a certain cultural, scientific, or moral authority, think and say. This shows the grave responsibility borne by people who because of their education or prestige form public opinion or influence its formation in some measure. People, in fact, have a right to think and feel in conformity with what is true and right, because from their way of thinking and feeling depends their moral performance. It will be right if their way of thinking conforms to the truth.

It needs to be underlined, in this connection, that public opinion has a great influence on the modes of thinking, feeling and behaving of those who, either because of their youth or their lack of education, are not capable of making critical judgments. Thus, there are many who think and act according to what is commonly thought in the community, without being in a position to resist the pressure it imposes on them. It must also be emphasized that public opinion exercises a powerful influence on the formation of laws. In fact, there is no doubt that the introduction in some countries of unjust laws, such as, for instance, legalized abortion, must be attributed to the pressure exercised by a public opinion which was favourable to the measure.

3. From this arises the importance of forming a morally healthy public opinion on matters which more closely affect the well-being of humanity in our time. Among these we would place the values of life, of the family, of peace, of justice, and of solidarity among peoples.

It is necessary that a public opinion should be formed which is sensitive to the absolute value of human life, so that it shall be recognized in all its stages, from conception to death, and in all its forms, even those marked by sickness or disability, physical or spiritual, as having this value. A materialistic and hedonistic mentality is in fact spreading, according to which life is worth living only when it is healthy, young and beautiful.

It is necessary that a correct public opinion should be formed on the family, a public opinion which will help to overcome some ways of thinking and of feeling which are not in conformity with the plan of God who has established the family indissoluble and productive. Unfortunately, a public opinion is becoming widespread favouring free love,

divorce and the drastic reduction of births, by any and every means; this needs to be rectified because it is injurious to the true good of humanity, which will enjoy true happiness to the exact extent that the family is united and in a healthy state.

Then, it is necessary to create a public opinion of constantly growing strength in favor of peace, and of what serves to bring it about and preserve it, such as reciprocal appreciation and mutual agreement among peoples; the rejection of every form of racial discrimination and exaggerated nationalism; the recognitions of the rights and just aspirations of peoples; disarmament, first of the spirit and then of the instruments of destruction; the effort to achieve the peaceful resolution of conflicts. It is clear that only a strong public opinion favorable to peace can put a stop to such as are tempted to see in war the way to resolve tensions and conflicts.

"State leaders rely to a large extent", states the pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, "on public opinion and public attitudes. Their peace-making efforts will be in vain, as long as men are divided and warring among themselves through hostility, contempt and distrust, as well as through racial hatred and uncompromising hostilities. Hence, there is a very urgent need of re-education and a new orientation of public opinion" (n. 82).

Finally, there is need for the formation of a strong public opinion in favour of the solution of the very distressing problems of social justice, of hunger and underdevelopment. What is required, in fact, is that these problems should be better known today in their tremendous reality and gravity, so that a strong and very widespread public opinion in favour of finding solutions to them shall be created. It is only under the vigorous and unrelenting pressure of such public opinion that the responsible politicians and economists of the rich countries will be induced to help the developing countries.

4. It is specially urgent that a healthy public opinion shall be formed in the area of morality and religion. To block the wider spread of a mentality favourable to moral permissiveness and religious indifference, there is need to form a public opinion which respects and appreciates moral and religious values for the reason that they make a person fully "human" and give life its full meaning. The danger of nihilism, that is, of the loss of the values which are most properly human, moral and religious, hangs over humanity today like a grave threat.

A correct public opinion, then, ought to be formed regarding the nature, mission and work of the Church, which is seen by many today as a simply human structure, and not as what it really is, a mysterious reality that incarnates the love of God in history and brings the love and the grace of Christ to humanity.

Communications serve humanity

5. In the world of today as it is, the instruments of social communications in their many forms - press, cinema, radio, television - are the principal makers; of public opinion. Great, then, is the moral responsibility of all those who have these instruments in their employ, or who are the guiding forces behind them. The media of social communications ought to be put at the service of humanity, and therefore of truth and goodness which constitute humanity's most important and necessary values. Those, therefore, who work professionally in the field of social communications should feel themselves under

obligation to form and to make widespread a public opinion which conforms with truth and goodness.

In this task Christians are expected to distinguish themselves, knowing well that in contributing to the formation of a public opinion favorable to justice, peace, fraternity, and religious and moral values, they are contributing in no small way to the growth of God's Kingdom, which is a kingdom of justice, of truth and of peace. From the Christian message which is directed to the well-being and the salvation of humanity, they can draw inspiration to assist their brothers in forming opinions that are right and sound, because they are in conformity with the plan of love and salvation for humankind which God has revealed and put into action in Jesus Christ. In fact, the Christian faith and teaching of the Church, precisely because they are founded on Christ, the way, the truth and the life, are light and strength for humanity in his passage through history.

I conclude this message with a special blessing for all those who work in social communications with a Christian spirit of service to the truth and promotion of moral and religious values. I assure them of my prayers, and I wish to encourage them in this work, which calls for courage and consistency, and which is a service to truth and to freedom. It is, in fact, the truth that makes people free (cf. *Jn* 8:32). And therefore, to work for the formation of a public opinion which is in conformity with the truth is to work for the growth of freedom.

XXI WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY

- JANUARY 24, 1987

Social Communications at the Service of Justice and Peace

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Social communications constitutes a platform of exchange and dialogue which responds to a particular concern of my Pontificate, and that of my Predecessor, Paul VI (cf. *Message to the Special Session of the United Nations on Disarmament*, 24 May 1978, 5): to contribute, in the promotion of peace through justice, to the passage from a balance of terror to a strategy of trust. With some urgency, therefore, I proposed as the theme for World Social Communications Day 1987: "Social Communications at the service of justice and peace". This I have repeated often, but I emphasize it today adding the following trust cannot be the work simply of those involved in politics, but it must come from the conscience of peoples. Having already dealt with the problem of peace (*World Day of Peace 1983*), this year I would like to continue this brief reflection on the work of justice which brings about peace, the strategy of trust as the fulfillment of justice in view of peace.

I know that for you, workers in the field of social communications, the masses are not an anonymous multitude. They represent a continuous challenge to reach each and everyone in their particular context, at their own level of understanding and sensibility, thanks to the ever-more advanced technologies and ever-more effective means of communication. This appeal might resound in your conscience: transmit the strategy of trust through the means of communication, at the service of justice and peace!

To a large extent, your strategy of communication is a plan of information with the aim of contributing to the building up of this society with the knowledge of what we are doing, no matter what might happen. Allow me to recall what I have already said in this respect: peace in the world depends on a better knowledge of men and communities; the qualified information of public opinion has a direct influence on the promotion of justice and peace (cf. *Message for World Peace Day 1982*, n. 6 and 8). Your task seems to go beyond human possibilities: informing in order to form, while the stream of news carries you to the four corners of the earth, sometimes in a dangerous manner, and without giving you the time to ponder over each case or each event. And therefore, the users of social communications depend on you for understanding the harm of terror and the hopes of trust

Peace is not possible without dialogue (cf. *Message for World Peace Day 1986*, n. 4-5), but true dialogue cannot be established without being well-informed, in the East and in the West, in the South and in the North. Furthermore, your dialogue wishes to be 'total dialogue', that is, a dialogue established in the context of a global strategy of communications: information, certainly, but also entertainment publicity, artistic creation, education, sensitivity to cultural values. It is through this strategy of communications that the strategy of trust should be realized. From the balance of apprehension, to that of fear, and finally to that of terror, springs a "cold peace"--as Pius XII said--which is not true peace. Only communication can, through true dialogue, bring about a desire and expectancy of a warm peace, seen as a necessity, in the hearts of peoples. And, it could be added, a "cold justice" is not true justice. Justice cannot live if not in trust, otherwise it is simply a "justice against" and not for "justice for" and "justice with" each human person.

How can we link the strategy of trust and the strategy of communication? I would like to develop this theme for reflection. I know that mass-communication is programmed and carefully organized. It is, therefore, important to bring to mind what could be a strategy of trust transmitted by the media. It seems to me that this could comprise seven fundamental aspects: making people aware, denouncing, renouncing, overcoming, contributing, spreading, and affirming.

In the first place, it is necessary to make people aware, or, in other words, to carry out a work of intelligence. Did not Paul VI say that peace is a work of intelligence? It will be necessary, therefore, through the various programmes, to make people aware that every war can lose everything, and that nothing can be lost with peace. For this, the strategy of communications can, better than any other means, make the cause of war understood: the innumerable injustices which stimulate violence. Every injustice can lead to war.

Violence is in us, we must free ourselves of it to discover peace. Such is the work of justice which is carried out as a fruit of intelligence. Intelligence, according to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council (cf. *Gaudium et Spes* n. 82-91), expresses itself above all through the positive choices suggested by questions of justice and peace, in the face of injustice and war. And it is precisely here that your role becomes interesting, due to the spirit of initiative which it bears.

Communicating the constructive choices of justice and peace goes hand in hand with your duty to denounce all causes of violence and conflict: generalized armaments, commerce of arms, oppression and torture, terrorism of every kind, over-militarization and an exaggerated concern for national security, North-South tension, and all forms of domination, occupation, repression, exploitation and discrimination.

To denounce in a coherent way, you must renounce yourself the roots of violence and injustice. One of the images most firmly integrated into the production of means of communication seems to be the "ideal of the strongest, this desire for supremacy which does nothing but increase mutual fear. Along the lines of what John XXIII affirmed, it is necessary to arrive, in your production, at a "disarmament of spirits" (Cf. *Address to journalists at the Council*, 13 October 1962). What could be the progress of exchanges in communication, if the market was amply supplied with programmes which present things entirely different from this will for domination which is the inspiration for so many works

in circulation at the moment! And what improvement in quality could be obtained if the users through their requests and recetions, could renounce the idea of the strongest! To act in a spirit of justice, it is not enough to act against" in the name of a hardened force. Rather it is necessary to "act through and with" others, or, in the world of the media, to communicate through and with each one.

The strategy of trust also signifies overcoming all the obstacles to the "works of justice" in view of peace. In the first place, it is necessary to overcome the barriers of mistrust. What better than social communications can overcome all the barriers of race, class, and culture which confront each other? Mistrust can be born from all forms of partiality and social, political or religious intolerance. Mistrust feeds on the discouragement which becomes defeatism. Trust, on the other hand, is the fruit of a more rigorous ethical attitude at all levels of daily life. Pope John XXIII recalled that it was necessary at all costs to overcome the imbalance between the technical possibilities and ethical commitment of the human community.

And you, both workers and users of social communications, you know well that the world of communications is an exploding world of technological progress. Even in this advanced sector of human experience, the ethical need is the most urgent at all levels.

Your role, furthermore, is that of contributing to making peace possible through justice. Information is the way of awareness, of verification, of controlling the reality of facts on the paths of peace. This contribution can be deepened by debates and public discussions within the media. It is perhaps at this level that your imagination will be put to its hardest test. And it is precisely here that the users' answer is most necessary.

We must not then forget the task of spreading with some insistence all that can help to make peace and justice understood and lived, right from the most humble initiatives at the service of peace and justice up to the efforts of international meetings. Among these initiatives, the role of a new world information and communications order, at the service of peace and justice, and with the guarantee of widespread information in favour of all, certainly occupies an important place, as I have already mentioned on the occasion of one of the congresses of the International Union of the Catholic Press (cf. *Address to the UCIP*, 25 September 1980). Your role as those responsible for social communications is one of continual education. As users of social communications, your duty is one of continual research for access to all data which can form your opinions and make you ever-more aware of your responsibilities. We are all responsible for the destiny of justice and peace.

In the midst of all the initiatives which you must spread, allow me to ask you with some insistence not to ignore the presentation of the Christian idea of peace and justice, the Christian message of peace and justice, without forgetting exhortations to commitment, but also to prayer for peace: irreplaceable dimensions of the ecclesial contributions to peace initiatives and in favour of efforts to live in justice.

These things you already know, as suggested by the presentation, through the means of social communication, of the true and complete image of the human person, foundation of every reference to justice and peace. Anything that wounds the person is already "an act of war" in its beginning. Therefore what incalculable consequences each of these communications' initiatives, of which you are the animators, will have!

In spreading these things, it is necessary finally to affirm all preliminary conditions in view of justice and peace: the inalienable rights of the human person, equal fundamental liberties in view of the participation of all in the common good, respect for legitimate sovereignty, the duties of indemnity and aid... But above all, we must shed light on the values of life: existence no longer seen as relentlessly engaged in a "struggle for life", but life lived with the intelligence of wisdom, in goodness, or again, love as a source and ideal of life. Only love, re-discovering fraternity every day, can definitively defeat terror. May love, inspired by the gift of God, act on these "marvellous techniques" of communication, which are also "gifts of God" (cf. *Miranda prorsus*)!

In the hope that these words will help you never to lose sight of justice and peace, as you, workers in social communications, begin to carry out your programmes, and as you, the users, listen and respond, I give you all my trust and ask you all to work for trust at the service of the whole of humanity. In this spirit, I impart to you with joy my Apostolic Blessing.

XXII WORLD COMMUNICATIONS

DAY - JANUARY 24, 1988

Social Communications and the Promotion of Solidarity and Fraternity between Peoples and Nations

Brothers and sisters, my dear friends, the communicators,

If one day it can be truly said that "to communicate" is the same as "to fraternize", that "communication" signifies human "solidarity", will not this be the most beautiful result of "mass communications"? It is on this theme that I would propose to you that we reflect on the 22nd World Communications Day.

In speaking of fraternity, I use the term in its strict meaning. It is Christ, in effect, "the first-born among many brethren" (*Rm. 8, 29*), who makes us discover in every human person, friend or even enemy, a brother or a sister. Christ who came "not to condemn the world but to save it" (cf. *John 3,17*), calls all humanity to unity. The Spirit of love which he gives to the world is also a Spirit of unity: St. Paul shows us the same Spirit who grants a variety of gifts, who acts in the different members of the same Body: there are "varieties of gifts... but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one" (*1 Cor. 12, 4-6*).

If I mention first the spiritual basis of fraternity and solidarity, it is because this Christian meaning is not at all unrelated to the human reality which the words primarily signify. The Church does not consider fraternity and solidarity to be values in any way reserved to itself. On the contrary, we remind ourselves always how Jesus praised the Good Samaritan who recognized a brother in the man who was wounded, in contrast to the priest and the Levite (cf. *Luke 10, 29-37*). In like manner, the Apostle Paul invites us not to despise the gifts of others, but to rejoice in the Spirit's workings in each of our brothers (*1 Cor. 12, 14-30*).

Fraternity and solidarity are basic and urgent things: they ought to be, in our times, distinguishing marks of peoples and cultures. The joyous unveiling of their happy, friendly, helpful relationships with one another: ought this not to be the most beautiful "festival" offered by mass communications, their most successful "show", in the best sense of these terms?

In this period of spectacular development in mass communications, the bonds which they weave between peoples and cultures represent the most precious and valuable support that they offer to humanity. I know, at the same time, that you communicators are aware

of perverse effects as well, which threaten distortion and disfigurement to these relations between peoples and cultures. Exaltation of the self, contempt for and rejection of those who are different, can aggravate tensions and divisions. From such attitudes spring violence, mistaken directions, destruction of true communication; for they render impossible all brotherly relationship.

In order that the very existence of brotherhood and human solidarity may be made possible, and still more so that their Christian dimension may be more intensely developed, the elementary values which underlie them have to be given recognition. Permit me here to recall certain of these: respect for others, willingness to dialogue, justice, healthy ethics in personal and community living, freedom, equality, peace in unity, promotion of the dignity of the human person, the capacity to share and to divine with others. Brotherhood and solidarity rise above all clannish and corporation spirit, all nationalism, all racism, every abuse of power, every individual fanaticism, be it cultural religious.

It is for the agents of mass communication to use the techniques and media at their disposal always with a conscientious regard for these primary values. Here I suggest only some of the possible applications:

--Let the information agencies and the whole ensemble of the press demonstrate their respect for others by giving complete and balanced information;

--the radiophonic diffusion of the word will the better attain its purpose in the measure in which the possibility of reciprocal exchange is offered to all;

--media which are the mouthpiece of particular groups contribute to the operation of justice in giving a voice also to the voiceless;

--television programmes touch on almost all aspects of life and the networks have countless possible applications and interconnections: considering their great influence, there must rest on those responsible for them an ethical imperative, obliging them to offer to persons and communities images which favour the mutual penetration of cultures, without intolerance and without violence, in the service of unity;

--the possibility of personal communications by telephone, their extension by teletext, their wider and wider spread by satellite, all this suggests that we should have a care for equality among persons and facilitate access to these media to a greater number, so as to permit really meaningful exchanges;

--information increasingly concerns economic or cultural activities, data banks bring together a quantity of diverse information which was unimaginable in earlier times: it is known that this could be used in such a way as to bring all sorts of pressure to bear on private community life; and the wise management of these media thus becomes a veritable precondition of peace;

--to create the "shows" which sustain the various audiovisual media implies an obligation to respect the consciences of the countless "spectators" in the audiences;

--advertising publicity awakens or increases desires and also creates needs: those who commission it or bring it to realization have to keep in mind the disadvantaged for whom the benefits advertised are out of reach.

Whatever the exact mode by which they intervene, it is necessary that the communicators observe a code of honour, that they have a care for the sharing out of the truth among and about humankind, and that they shall contribute to a new world order of information and of communication.

In the midst of the ever more concentrated and active network of social communications spanning the world, the Church binds itself simply to keep on ceaselessly recalling, as "an expert in humanity", the values which constitute the grandeur of the human being. But she is at the same time convinced that these cannot be assimilated and put into action in the concrete, if the spiritual life of the human being is forgotten. For Christians, the revelation of God in Christ is an illumination on man and woman, on humanity itself. Faith in the message of salvation constitutes the most deeply felt motivation for serving the human race. The gifts of the Spirit engage us in the service of others in a brotherly solidarity.

The question may be asked of us: are we not perhaps too trusting in our openness to this kind of thinking? Do the tendencies which are apparent in the field of mass communication really permit us to entertain such hopes?

To hearts which are troubled by the risks of the new technologies of communication, I would reply: "Fear not"! Far from ignoring the reality in which we live, we read it more profoundly. We distinguish, in the Light of faith, the authentic signs of the times. The Church, full of care for man and woman, is aware of the deep aspiration of the human race for fraternity and solidarity--an inspiration often disowned or disfigured, but indestructible because it is sculpted in the human heart by the same God who has created in it the need for communication and the capacity to develop it on a planetary scale.

On the threshold of the third millennium, the Church reminds men and women that fraternity and solidarity cannot be regarded merely as conditions for survival; they are essentials of their vocation, a vocation which the exercise of social communication permits them to realize freely.

Permit me then to say to you all, especially in this Marian Year "Do not be afraid!" Was not Mary herself frightened at the announcement which contained the sign of salvation offered to the whole of humanity?

"Blessed is she who believed", as Elizabeth testified (*Lk.* 1,45). It is thanks to her faith that the Virgin Mary accepts God's plan, enters into the mystery of trinitarian communion, and, becoming the Mother of Christ, inaugurates in history a new fraternity.

Blessed are those who believe, those whom the faith liberates from fear and opens to hope and leads to the construction of a world where, in fraternity and solidarity, there is place for the communication of joy!

Animated by this profound joy for the gifts of communication received for the building-up of all, in this solid fraternity, I invoke on each one of you the Blessing of the Most High.

XXIII WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY - JANUARY 24, 1989

Religion in the Mass Media

Brothers and sisters, my dear friends the communicators,

1. The theme of the World Day of Social Communications this year, "Religion in the Media", underlines the special importance of the Church's presence and of the part it plays in public dialogue. In our days, in fact, religious messages, as well as cultural messages, gain an increased impact from the intervention of the social communications media. The reflection which I would like to share with you on this occasion will illustrate a concern that has been constantly with me throughout my pontificate: what place can religion have in the life of society and, more exactly, what place can religion have in the media?
2. In the course of its pastoral activity, the Church naturally asks itself questions regarding the media's attitude to "religion". The fact is that at the very time the media and the techniques of communication are enjoying such developments, the industrial world which has assisted their extraordinary growth itself shows a "secularism" which is apparently bent on hastening the disappearance of any sense of religion among the people of our day.
3. Meanwhile, it is plain to see that religious information is tending to get more attention in the media, by reason of the increased interest which is now generally taken in the religious dimension of human realities, whether of the individual or of society. To analyse this phenomenon, one should question the readers of newspapers and the people who watch television or listen to the radio, because it is not a matter of the media imposing religion upon them unasked; it is rather that those responsible for mass communication are simply responding to specific requests they have been receiving to give more space to information and commentary on religious affairs. Throughout the entire world there are millions of persons who turn to religion in order to make sense of their lives; millions of people for whom relationship with God, their Creator and Father, is the happiest reality of human existence. The communications professionals are well aware of this, and act accordingly. And even if this interaction between those in the communications media and the public is marked by incompleteness and partiality, there is this positive fact: religion is there today in the mainstream of media information.

4. By a happy blend of circumstances, World Communications Day in 1989 coincides with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the foundation of the Pontifical Commission for social Communications, which from now on will be a "Pontifical Council". What has it achieved in its twenty-five years of service in the apostolate of communications? Assuredly, the Church itself has learnt to discern more clearly the "signs of the times", and the phenomenon of communication is very much one of them. My predecessor Pius XII had already invited it to look upon the media not as a threat, but as a "gift" (cfr. the encyclical *Miranda Prorsus* of 1957). The Second Vatican Council in its turn solemnly confirmed this positive attitude (cfr. *Decree Inter Mirifica*, 1963). The Pontifical Commission which was then born and which today exists as the Pontifical Council has given itself fully and perseveringly to the promotion within the Church of an attitude of participation and of creativity in this sector, or, better, in the new style of life and sharing of humanity.

5. The question confronting the Church today is not any longer whether the man in the street can grasp a religious message, but how to employ the communications media so as to let him have the full impact of the gospel message. The Lord encourages us very directly and very simply to take the broader view in our witness and our communication: Do not be afraid ... what you hear in whispers, proclaim from the housetops (*Mt. 10, 26-27*). To what is he referring? The evangelist throws light upon it: Christ wishes us to declare ourselves for him before men (cfr. *Mt. 10, 32*). So here it is then, the daring, humble and serene at the same time, which inspires the Christian presence in the middle of the public media debate! St. Paul says to us: "Preaching the gospel is not a thing I boast about, since it is a duty which has been laid on me" (*1 Cor. 9, 16*). Throughout the Scriptures the same fidelity is spoken of: "I have made no secret of your love and faithfulness in the Great Assembly" (*Ps. 40/39, 10*), and "All men will tell what God has wrought" (*Ps. 64/63, 9*).

Communicators and public of the media, you must both question yourselves about the constantly changing demands of this "religion pure and undefiled" which invites us to keep ourselves unstained from the world (*James 1, 27*). Even these pieces of wisdom from the Bible make you understand immediately that the great challenge of religious witness for those who are in the midst of the public debate is to keep the messages and exchanges authentic and to maintain high standards of quality in the programmes and productions.

6. In the name of the whole Church, I wish to thank the world of communication for the place which it offers religion in the media. I am certain that I am interpreting correctly the feeling of all people of good will when I express this gratitude, even if it does often seem to us that there is room for improvement in the possibilities permitted for a Christian presence in the public debate. I am happy to join in expressing thanks to the media for giving prominence to religious information, documentation, dialogue, and data gathering.

I would also like to ask of all communicators that they show themselves, by their careful adherence to the highest standards of professional ethics and practice, worthy of the opportunity given them to present the message of hope and reconciliation with God in media of every kind and discipline. The "gifts of God" (cfr. Pius XII, encyclical *Miranda Prorsus*): do we not have here a mysterious encounter between the technological

possibilities of the language of communication and the openness of the human spirit to the splendid message of the Lord and His witnesses? It is at this level that the quality of our ecclesial presence in the public debate is in play. More than ever, the holiness of the apostle supposes a "divinization" (to use an expression of the Church Fathers) of the entirety of human ingenuity. It is for this reason also that the liturgical celebration of the mysteries of faith cannot be left out in this vast movement of presence to the world of today through the mass media.

7. Thinking about all this, I make with simplicity and confidence a request for something very close to my heart. It comes out of the same feeling of friendship as that which made Paul say to Philemon: "I write with full confidence ... knowing that you will do even more than I ask" (*Phil* 1, 21). Here is my request: give to religion all the space possible in mass communications. "Open the gates, let the upright nation come in; she, the faithful one ... who keeps the peace" (cfr. *Is.* 26, 2a, 3a). It is this that I ask in favour of religion. You will see, dear friends, that these religious themes will have the power to inspire in the measure in which they are competently presented by professionals themselves deeply convinced of them in their own souls. Once the communicator is open to the religious message, his own message gains in quality and interest. To Church media workers I repeat: equally in your case "you have received the spirit of adoption of sons, which makes you cry out: Abba! Father!" (cfr. *Rm.* 8, 15).

The message and the initiatives of religion can be present in all types of media: in the press, in written and audio-visual information programmes, in cinematographic creations, in data banks and telematic exchanges, in theatrical communication and stage shows and high level cultural presentations, in public opinion debate and in commentaries on the news, in services which educate public thinking, in all the productions of group media, through animated drawings and quality cartoon strips, in all the varied forms in which written literature is distributed, in audio- and video- recordings, in the moments of relaxation with music on local or network radio! It is my very ardent wish that the Catholic and Christian networks may be able to collaborate constructively with cultural communications networks of every kind, overcoming a preoccupation with competition in view of the ultimate good which comes from the message of religion. The Church itself, on this occasion of World Communications Day, invites all concerned to take under serious consideration the demand for ecumenical and inter-religious cooperation in the media.

8. Concluding this message, I certainly must not fail to encourage all those who have at heart the apostolate of communication to give themselves with ardour and energy, and with due respect for every person, to the great work of evangelization in which each is challenged to take part: "But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God" (*Lk.* 9, 60). And there is something I must add: it is in proclaiming and in living the Word that we ourselves will come to grasp the unsuspected depths of the Gift of God.

Welcoming God's will and with confidence, I declare to all of you, media workers and public, my joy at finding you linked together today across such mighty distances in a common reflection designed to find and deepen that 'religion pure and undefiled' which we will all then take our part in proclaiming "from the housetops"; and I invoke on you all the blessing of the Lord.

XXIV WORLD COMMUNICATIONS

DAY - JANUARY 24, 1990

The Christian Message in a Computer Culture

Brothers and Sisters, Dear Friends,

In one of her Eucharistic Prayers, the Church addresses God in these words: "You formed man in your own likeness and set him over the whole world, to serve you, his creator, and to rule over all creatures" (*Eucharistic Prayer IV*).

For man and woman thus created and commissioned by God, the ordinary working day has great and wonderful significance. People's ideas, activities and undertakings - however commonplace they may be - are used by the Creator to renew the world, to lead it to salvation, to make it a more perfect instrument of divine glory,

Almost twenty-five years ago, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, reflecting on the Church in the modern world, declared that men and women, serving their families and the community in their ordinary occupations, were entitled to look upon their work as "a prolongation of the work of the Creator ... and as their personal contribution to the fulfillment in history of the divine plan" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 34).

As the Council Fathers looked to the future and tried to discern the context in which the Church would be called upon to carry out her mission, they could clearly see that the progress of technology was already "transforming the face of the earth" and even reaching out to conquer space (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 5). They recognized that developments in communications technology, in particular, were likely to set off chain reactions with unforeseen consequences.

Far from suggesting that the Church should stand aloof or try to isolate herself from the mainstream of these events, the Council Fathers saw the Church as being in the very midst of human progress, sharing the experiences of the rest of humanity, seeking to understand them and to interpret them in the light of faith. It was for God's faithful people to make creative use of the new discoveries and technologies for the benefit of humanity and the fulfillment of God's plan for the world.

This recognition of rapid change and this openness to new developments have proved timely in the years that followed, for the pace of change and development has continued to accelerate. Today, for example, one no longer thinks or speaks of social communications as mere instruments or technologies. Rather they are now seen as part of

a still unfolding culture whose full implications are as yet imperfectly understood and whose potentialities remain for the moment only partly exploited.

Here we find the basis for our reflections on this Twentyfourth World Communications Day. With each day that passes the vision of earlier years becomes ever more a reality. It was a vision which foresaw the possibility of real dialogue between widely-separated peoples, of a worldwide sharing of ideas and aspirations, of growth in mutual knowledge and understanding, of a strengthening of brotherhood across many hitherto insurmountable barriers (cf. *Communio et Progressio*, 181, 182).

With the advent of computer telecommunications and what are known as computer participation systems, the Church is offered further means for fulfilling her mission. Methods of facilitating communication and dialogue among her own members can strengthen the bonds of unity between them, Immediate access to information makes it possible for her to deepen her dialogue with the contemporary world, In the new "computer culture" the Church can more readily inform the world of her beliefs and explain the reasons for her stance on any given issue or event. She can hear more clearly the voice of public opinion, and enter into a continuous discussion with the world around her, thus involving herself more immediately in the common search for solutions to humanity's many pressing problems (cf. *Communio et Progressio*, 114 ff.).

It is clear that the Church must also avail herself of the new resources provided by human exploration in computer and satellite technology for her ever pressing task of evangelization. Her most vital and urgent message has to do with knowledge of Christ and the way of salvation which he offers. This is something she must put before the people of every age, inviting them to embrace the Gospel out of love, ever mindful that "truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth. which wins over the mind with both gentleness and power" (*Dignitatis Humanae*, 1).

As the wisdom and insights of past years teach us: "God has spoken to humanity according to the culture proper to each age. Similarly the Church, which in the course of time has existed in varying circumstances, has utilized the resources of different cultures in her preaching to spread and explain the message of Christ" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 58). "The first proclamation, catechesis or the further deepening of faith cannot do without the (means of social communication). ... The Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect. It is through them that she proclaims 'from the housetops' the message of which she is the depositary" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 45).

Surely we must be grateful for the new technology which enables us to store information in vast man-made artificial memories, thus providing wide and instant access to the knowledge which is our human heritage. to the Church's teaching and tradition, the words of Sacred Scripture, the counsels of the great masters of spirituality, the history and traditions of the local Churches, of Religious Orders and lay institutes, and to the ideas and experiences of initiators and innovators whose insights bear constant witness to the faithful presence in our midst of a loving Father who brings out of his treasure new things and old (cf. *Mt* 13:52).

Young people especially are readily adapting to the computer culture and its "language". This is surely a cause for satisfaction. Let us "trust the young" (*Communio et Progressio*,

70), They have had the advantage of growing up with the new developments, and it will be their duty to employ these new instruments for a wider and more intense dialogue among all the diverse races and classes who share this "shrinking globe". It falls to them to search out ways in which the new systems of data conservation and exchange can be used to assist in promoting greater universal justice, greater respect for human rights a healthy development for all individuals and peoples, and the freedoms essential for a fully human life.

Whether we are young or old, let us rise to the challenge of new discoveries and technologies by bringing to them a moral vision rooted in our religious faith, in our respect for the human person, and our commitment to transform the world in accordance with God's plan. On this World Communications Day, let us pray for wisdom in using the potential of the "computer age" to serve man's human and transcendent calling, and thus to give glory to the Father from whom all good things come.

XXV WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY - JANUARY 24, 1991

The Communications media and the unity and progress of the human family

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

For the celebration of this World Communications Day, we return to the theme which formed the central message of the Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio*, approved by Pope Paul VI in 1971, regarding the application of the Decree of the Second Vatican Council on the Means of Social Communication. Prepared in obedience to the Council Fathers wishes, that Instruction saw the chief aims of social communication and all the means it uses as the unity and progress of the human family. On the Twentieth Anniversary of this important Document, I wish to return to that basic consideration in order to invite the members of the Church to reflect once more on the serious problems and rich new opportunities occasioned by continuing developments in the communications media, especially in relation to the unity and progress of peoples everywhere.

The Church has long held the conviction that the media (press, radio, television, film and cinema) are to be regarded as "gifts of God" (cf. Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Miranda Prorsus*, AAS, 24 [1957], p. 765). The list of the "gifts" which comprise the communications media has continued to lengthen since the Pastoral Instruction was published. Such contemporary items as satellites, computers, home video recorders and ever improving methods for the transmission of information are now at the disposal of the human family. The purpose of these new gifts is the same as that of the more traditional communications media: to draw us closer together in brotherhood and mutual understanding, and to help us to go forward in the pursuit of our human destiny as God's beloved sons and daughters.

The link between this general consideration and the reflection I wish to offer on this occasion is clear and direct: such powerful means placed at man's disposal demand in their use a lofty sense of responsibility on the part of all involved. In the words of the 1971 Pastoral Instruction, the communications media are "lifeless instruments". Whether or not they fulfill the purpose for which they were given to us greatly depends on the wisdom and sense of responsibility with which they are used.

In the Christian view, the communications media are wonderful instruments at man's disposal, under God's Providence, for building closer and more enlightened relationships between individuals and throughout the human family. Indeed, as they develop, the media are capable of fashioning a new language which enables people to know and understand one another more easily, and therefore to work together more readily for the common good (cf. *Communio et Progressio*, 12). If however they are to be effective means of fellowship and genuine human advancement, the media must be a channel and expression of truth, justice and peace, good will and active charity, mutual help, love and communion (cf. *ibid.*, 12 and 13). Whether the media serve to enrich or impoverish man's nature depends on the moral vision and ethical responsibility of those involved in the communications process and of the recipients of the media's message.

Every member of the human family, whether the humblest consumer or the most powerful producer of media programmes, has an individual responsibility in this respect. I therefore appeal to the Pastors of the Church and to the Catholic faithful who are engaged in the world of communications to refresh their knowledge of the principles and guidelines which were so clearly set out in *Communio et Progressio*. May all better understand where their duty lies and may they be encouraged to carry out these duties as a fundamental service to the unity and progress of the human family.

It is my hope that this Twenty-fifth World Communications Day will be an occasion of renewed attention on the part of parishes and local communities to the realities of the media and their influence on society, on the family, and on individuals, especially children and young people. Twenty years after *Communio et Progressio* it is possible to subscribe fully to that. Document's warning and expectation about developments in communications: "Suddenly... the responsibilities of the People of God will enormously increase. Never before will they have been offered such opportunities. It will be possible to ensure that the media promote the advance of the whole human race... It will be possible to strengthen the brotherhood of man. And then the Good News can be given everywhere, bearing witness to Christ the Saviour" (No. 182). I earnestly ask God to guide and support you in the realization of that great hope and task!

XXVI WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY - JANUARY 24, 1992

The Proclamation of Christ' Message in the Communications Media

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

For the twenty-sixth successive year, in response to a directive given by the Second Vatican Council, the Church celebrates a World Day dedicated to social communications.

What is it that this Day celebrates? It is a way of acknowledging with gratitude a specific gift of God, a gift which has enormous significance for the period of human history in which we are living, the gift of all those technical means which facilitate, enhance and enrich communications between human beings.

On this Day, we celebrate the blessings of speech, of hearing and of sight, which enable us to emerge from our isolation and loneliness in order to exchange with those around us the thoughts and sentiments which arise in our hearts. We celebrate the gifts of writing and reading by which the wisdom of our ancestors is placed at our disposal and our own experience and reflection are passed on to the generations that follow us. Then, as if these wonders were of small account, we recognize the value of "marvels" even more wonderful: "the marvels of technology which God has destined human genius to discover" (*Inter Mirifica*, 1), inventions which in our time have immeasurably increased and extended the range over which our communications may carry and have amplified the volume of our voice so that it can simultaneously come to the ears of multitudes beyond counting.

The communications media - and we exclude none of them from our celebration - are the admission ticket of every man and woman to the modern marketplace where thoughts are given public utterance, where ideas are exchanged, news is passed around, and information of all kind is transmitted and received (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 37). For all of this we praise our Heavenly Father from whom comes "every good endowment and every perfect gift" (*Jas* 1:17).

Our celebration, while essentially one of gladness and thanksgiving, is of necessity tempered with sadness and regret. By the very media we are celebrating we receive constant reminders of the limitations of our human condition, of the presence of evil in individuals and in society, of the senseless violence and injustice human beings wreak upon one another under so many pretexts. Through the media we often find ourselves in the position of helpless spectators assisting at atrocities committed all over the globe, whether the reason for them be historical rivalries, or racial prejudices, a desire for vengeance, a lust for power, greed for possessions, selfishness, or a lack of respect for human life and human rights. Christians deplore these happenings and motivations. But they are called to do much more; they must endeavour to overcome evil with good (cf. *Rom* 12:21).

The Christian response to evil is, above all, to harken to the Good News and to make God's message of salvation in Jesus Christ ever more present. Christians have a "good news" to tell. We have Christ's message - and it is our joy to share it with every man and woman of good will who is prepared to listen.

We tell it first by the witness of our lives, for, as Pope Paul VI wisely said, "modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41). We are expected to be like a city on a hill, like a lamp on a lampstand, visible to all, our light shining like a beacon signaling the safe channel to a peaceful haven (cf. *Mt* 5: 13-14).

When our individual and community lives exemplify the beliefs and values we profess as Christians, this fact cannot fail to be brought to the attention of the world by all communications media that truly reflect the reality of things. Such a proclamation of Christ's message can already accomplish great good. How effective would be such a universal witness on the part of the members of the Church!

But, a still more explicit proclamation is also expected of Christ's followers. We are obliged to proclaim our beliefs "in the light of day" and "from the housetops" (*Mt* 10,27; *Lk* 12,3), without fear or compromise, adapting the divine message, naturally, "to people's way of talking and their patterns of thought" (*Communio et Progressio*, 11), and always with a sensitivity towards their actual beliefs and convictions equal to the sensitivity which we expect from them in regard to our own. Our proclamation must invariably be made with that twofold respect which the Church insists on: respect for all human beings without exception in their quest for answers to the deepest questions of their lives, and respect for the action of the Spirit, already mysteriously present in every human heart (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 29).

Christ, we remember, forced his teaching on no one. He presented it to all without exclusion, but left each one free to respond to his invitation. This is the pattern which we, his disciples, follow. We claim that all men and women have the right to hear the saving message which he left with us; and we claim for them the right to embrace it if it convinces them. Far from feeling any obligation to apologize for putting Christ's message

at the disposal of all, we claim with full conviction that it is our right and obligation to do no less.

There exists a corresponding right and obligation to use for this purpose all the new media of communication which distinguish our times. Indeed "the Church would feel herself guilty before God if she did not avail herself of those powerful instruments which human skill is constantly developing and perfecting" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 45).

It is clearly realized that these "powerful instruments" require specific skills and disciplines on the part of those who use them, and that to communicate intelligibly in these "new languages" there is a need for both special aptitudes and appropriate training.

It is in this connection that on World Communications Day I recall the activities of Catholics, individually and in a myriad of institutions and organizations, in this field. In particular I mention the three great Catholic Media Organizations: the International Catholic Office for Film and Cinema (OCIC), The International Catholic Press Union (UCIP), and the International Catholic Association for Radio and Television (Unda). It is to them in particular and to the vast resources of professional knowledge, skill and zeal among their extensive international membership that the Church hopefully and confidently turns as she seeks to proclaim Christ's message in a form adapted to the instruments now at her disposal and in language intelligible to the worldwide media-conditioned culture to which it must be addressed.

The great body of Catholic media professionals, lay men and women for the most part, must be reminded on this special day of the awesome responsibility which rests upon them, but they must also be made to feel that they enjoy the spiritual support and firm solidarity of the whole body of the faithful. I wish to encourage them to even greater and more urgent efforts, both to communicate the message through the media and to train others to do so. I appeal to all Catholic organizations, to Religious Congregations and ecclesial movements, but in a special way to Episcopal Conferences, both national and regional, to foster the Church's presence in the media and to work for greater coordination among the Catholic agencies involved. In fulfilling her mission, the Church needs to be able to count on a far-reaching and more effective use of the means of social communication.

May God be the strength and support of all Catholics involved in the world of communications as they re-dedicate themselves to the work which he so clearly requires of them. As a token of his divine presence and of his all-empowering help for their efforts, I gladly impart to them my Apostolic Blessing.

XXVII WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY - JANUARY 24, 1993

Videocassettes and Audiocassettes in the Formation of Culture and of Conscience

My dear brothers and sisters,

More than a full year after the publication of the Church's latest pastoral instruction on communications media, *Aetatis Novae*, we are still reflecting on the vision of the modern world which it presented, and still trying to grasp the practical implications of the media situation it described. This is precisely what the Church would wish us to do. The entire family of the Church must involve itself prayerfully in the search for understanding and awareness in the unprecedented situations so often nowadays cast up by the world's headlong progress in discovery and development. Each individual must add his voice to the Church's unceasing petition for wisdom, for we greatly need divine guidance in order to grasp each opportunity that offers to serve God and His people, while at the same time taking the measures necessary to fend off whatever evil may threaten them.

The pastoral instruction *Aetatis Novae*, we should notice, uses the word "new" even in its own title. "At the dawn of a new era", it says, "a vast expansion of human communications is profoundly influencing culture everywhere", and it goes on to claim that everybody is affected. The instruction uses the word "new" again and again: "new media", "new languages", "new opportunities", in its anxiety to illustrate that the world in the 'Eighties and 'Nineties is no longer the same as it was in previous decades and generations. The argument is that the world in which God's people are on pilgrimage is quite largely a changed place, and that "new media" are quite largely responsible for changing it. The pilgrim people, however, must adapt to what is changed, must find ways to cope with it, must search to turn it to God's glory and the service of all his creation.

In my message for World Communications Day last year, I mentioned that among the things we always celebrate on this annual occasion are the gifts of speech, of hearing, and of sight, which God has given us in order to make communication possible between us. This year the theme of the Day focuses on two specific "new" media which serve these very senses in a quite remarkable way, namely, audiocassettes and videocassettes.

These are truly remarkable gifts of God to our times, making it possible for us to conserve and easily transport, so that we may hear and view them over and over again, by ourselves or in the company of others, in our homes or elsewhere, as we choose, unlimited numbers of programmes in voice or vision, or both, whether for instruction or entertainment, for more complete understanding of news and information, or solely, perhaps, for artistic enjoyment.

Let me say again, and with emphasis, that the audiocassette and the videocassette are gifts of God, gifts, we may say, kept in His treasury through all the ages until our time, kept -- for us. We must clearly understand that he did not give them to us for our harm. "All things you love", says Wisdom, "nor hold any of your creatures in abhorrence; hate and create you could not, nor does aught abide save at your will, whose summoning word hold them in being. They are yours, and you spare them, ... you the Master of them all" (*Wisdom* 11, 24-25).

It is not by accident that we find ourselves exactly where we are in this passing world, and at this passing moment, never to be repeated, in the history of the human race. This has come about by a special disposition of God's providence. He wills us to be here, now and at no other time, with opportunities to serve our contemporaries by means never before available or even imagined, and thus to render glory to His Majesty in ways never previously possible.

For those engaged professionally in the production of audio or video programmes in cassette or other forms, there will often be opportunities to integrate the Christian message in one way or another, explicitly or implicitly, "into the 'new culture' created by modern communications" (*A.N.* 11). This is something which should be expected to happen as a natural consequence of "the Church's active, sympathetic presence within the world of communications" (*ibid.*).

The professional who rates at its true value the impact and influence of the media productions he creates, will take particular care to make them of such high moral quality that their effect upon the formation of the culture of his generation, will be invariably a positive one. To be true to himself, to his craft, and to his faith, he must evidently resist the ever-present blandishments of easy profit, and firmly refuse to take part in any production which exploits human weakness, offends human conscience, or affronts human dignity.

The role of the non-specialist, or "ordinary christian/citizen", in relation to media such as the audio- or video-cassette, must not be seen as that of a consumer merely. Each individual, simply by making his reactions to the media offerings placed before him known to those who produce and market them, will exercise a definite effect on the subject matter and moral tone of future offerings. The consumer must take very seriously his responsibility to make this active contribution to the protection and improvement of the media environment in which he and his dependents must exist.

To all the media professionals, men and women, who strive to serve their fellows in the various branches of the social communications industry, to all the beloved members of the International Catholic Organizations for Media active and at their posts throughout the world, and to the vast body of media consumers who are their audience and very weighty responsibility, I send, with affection and warmest fellow-feelings, on this World Communications Day, my Apostolic Blessing.

XXVIII WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY - JANUARY 24, 1994

Television and Family: Guidelines for Good Viewing

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In recent decades, television has spearheaded a communications revolution which has profoundly affected family life. Today television is a primary source of news, information and entertainment for countless families, shaping their attitudes and opinions, their values and patterns of behaviour.

Television can enrich family life. It can draw family members closer together and foster their solidarity with other families and with the community at large. It can increase not only their general knowledge but also their religious knowledge, making it possible for them to hear God's word, to strengthen their religious identity, and to nurture their moral and spiritual life.

Television can also harm family life: by propagating degrading values and models of behaviour, by broadcasting pornography and graphic depictions of brutal violence; by inculcating moral relativism and religious skepticism; by spreading distorted, manipulative accounts of news events and current issues; by carrying exploitative advertising that appeals to base instincts, and by glorifying false visions of life that obstruct the realization of mutual respect, of justice and of peace.

Even when television programmes themselves are not morally objectionable, television can still have negative effects on the family. It can isolate family members in their private worlds, cutting them off from authentic interpersonal relations; it can also divide the family by alienating parents from children and children from parents.

Because the moral and spiritual renewal of the human family as a whole must be rooted in the authentic renewal of individual families, the theme for the 1994 World Communications Day -- "Television and the Family: Guidelines for Good Viewing" -- is especially timely, particularly during this International Year of the Family, when the world community is seeking ways to strengthen family life.

In this message, I wish especially to highlight the responsibilities of parents, of the men and women of the television industry, of public authorities, and of those with pastoral and educational duties in the Church. In their hands lies the power to make television an ever more effective medium in helping families to fulfill their role as a force for moral and social renewal.

God has entrusted parents with the grave responsibility of helping their children "to seek the truth from their earliest years and to live in conformity with the truth, to seek the good and promote it (*Message for the 1991 World Day of Peace*, No. 3). It is therefore their duty to lead their children to appreciate "whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious" (*Phil* 4:8).

Thus, besides being discriminating television viewers themselves, parents should actively help to form in their children viewing habits conducive to sound development, human, moral and religious. Parents should inform themselves in advance about programme content and make a conscious choice on that basis for the good of the family -- to watch or not to watch. Reviews and evaluations provided by religious agencies and other responsible groups -- together with sound media education programmes -- can be helpful in this regard. Parents should also discuss television with their children, guiding them to regulate the amount and quality of their viewing, and to perceive and judge the ethical values underlying particular programmes, because the family is "the privileged means for transmitting the religious and cultural values which help the person to acquire his or her own identity" (*Message for the 1994 World Day of Peace*, No. 2).

Forming children's viewing habits will sometimes mean simply turning off the television set: because there are better things to do, because consideration for other family members requires it, or because indiscriminate television viewing can be harmful. Parents who make regular, prolonged use of television as a kind of electronic baby-sitter surrender their role as the primary educators of their children. Such dependence on television can deprive family members of opportunities to interact with one another through conversation, shared activities and common prayer. Wise parents are also aware that even good programmes should be supplemented by other sources of news, entertainment, education and culture.

To guarantee that the television industry will safeguard the rights of the family, parents should express their legitimate concerns to media managers and producers. Sometimes they will find it useful to join with others in associations which represent their interests in relation to the media, to sponsors and advertisers, and to public authorities.

Television personnel -- executives and managers, producers and directors, writers and researchers, journalists, on-camera performers and technical workers -- all have serious moral responsibilities to the families that make up such a large part of their audience. In their professional and personal lives, those who work in television should be committed to the family as society's basic community of life, love and solidarity. Recognizing the influence of the medium in which they work, they should promote sound moral and spiritual values, and avoid "anything that could harm the family in its existence, its

stability, its balance and its happiness," including "eroticism or violence, the defense of divorce or of antisocial attitudes among young people" (Paul VI, *Message for the 1969 World Communications Day*, No. 2).

Television is often required to deal with serious themes: with human weakness and sin, and their consequences for individuals and society; with the failings of social institutions, including government and religion; with weighty questions about the meaning of life. It should treat these subjects responsibly -- without sensationalism and with a sincere concern for the good of society, as well as with scrupulous regard for the truth. "The truth shall make you free" (*Jn* 8:32), Jesus said, and ultimately all truth has its foundation in God, who is also the source of our freedom and creativity.

In fulfilling its public responsibilities, the television industry should develop and observe a code of ethics which includes a commitment to serving the needs of families and to promoting values supportive of family life. Media councils, with members from both the industry and the general public, are also a highly desirable way of making television more responsive to the needs and values of its audiences.

Whether television channels are under public or private management, they represent a public trust for the service of the common good; they are not the mere private preserve of commercial interests or an instrument of power or propaganda for social, economic or political elites; they exist to serve the well-being of society as a whole.

Thus, as the fundamental "cell" of society, the family deserves to be assisted and defended by appropriate measures of the State and other institutions (cf. *Message for the 1994 World Day of Peace*, No. 5). This points to certain responsibilities on the part of public authorities where television is concerned.

Recognizing the importance of a free exchange of ideas and information, the Church supports freedom of speech and of the press (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 59). At the same time, she insists that "the rights of individuals, families and society itself to privacy, public decency and the protection of basic values" demand to be respected (Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Pornography and Violence in the Media: A Pastoral Response*, No. 21). Public authorities are invited to set and enforce reasonable ethical standards for programming which will foster the human and religious values on which family life is built, and will discourage whatever is harmful. They should also encourage dialogue between the television industry and the public, providing structures and forums to make this possible.

Church-related agencies, for their part, render an excellent service to families by offering them media education and film and programme evaluation. Where resources permit, Church communications agencies can also help families by producing and disseminating family-oriented programming, or by promoting such programming. Episcopal Conferences and Dioceses should consistently make the "family dimension" of television part of their pastoral planning for communications (cf. Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Aetatis Novae*, 21-23).

Since television professionals are engaged in presenting a vision of life to a vast audience, which includes children and young people, they can profit from the pastoral ministry of the Church, which can help them to appreciate those ethical and religious principles which give full meaning to human and family life. "Typically, pastoral programmes of this sort should include ongoing formation which will help these men and women -- many of whom sincerely wish to know and to do what is ethically and morally right -- to integrate moral norms ever more fully into their professional work as well as their private lives" (ibid., 19).

The family, founded on marriage, is a unique communion of persons which God has made the "natural and fundamental group unit of society" (*Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, art. 16,3). Television and the other communications media have immense power to sustain and strengthen such communion within the family, as well as solidarity with other families and a spirit of service to society. Grateful for the contribution to such communion within the family and among families which television as a communications medium has made and can make, the Church -- herself a communion in the truth and love of Jesus Christ, the Word of God -- takes the occasion of World Communications Day 1994 to encourage families themselves, media personnel and public authorities to realize to the full their noble calling to strengthen and promote society's first and most vital community, the family.

XXIX WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY – MAY 28, 1995

Cinema: Communicator of Culture and of Values

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

This year, on the occasion of World Communications Day, I would like to invite you to think about the cinema as "a communicator of culture and of values". As you certainly will know, during the current year celebrations are being held around the world to commemorate the first centennial of this special and widespread medium of expression, now so easily accessible to all.

The Church has often pointed out the importance of the communications media in transmitting and promoting human and religious values (cf. Pius XII, *Miranda prorsus*, 1957) and the special responsibilities that ensue for those who work in this difficult field. The Church, in fact, considering the progress that has been made and the developments that have taken place in the world of social communication in recent decades, is well aware both of the dangerous conditioning power enjoyed by the mass media as well as of the capacity that they offer, if wisely used, of being useful for evangelization.

As I wrote in the Message published on the occasion of the World Communications Day of 1989, "the question confronting the Church today is not any longer whether the man in the street can grasp a religious message but how to employ the communications media so as to let him have the full impact of the gospel message" (John Paul II, Message for World Communications Day, 1989).

Among the media of social communication, the cinema is by now a universal and esteemed medium from which messages are often sent which are capable of influencing and conditioning the choices of the public, and especially young people, in a form of

communication that is based not so much on words as on concrete events, expressed in images which impact greatly on the viewers and on their subconscious.

The cinema, since it was invented, while sometimes giving rise to criticism and disapproval on the part of the Church on account of some aspects of its extensive output,

has also often dealt with themes of great meaning and value from an ethical and spiritual point of view.

I would like to recall here, for example, the numerous film presentations of the life and passion of Jesus and of the lives of the saints, still available in many film libraries, and which are useful, above all, to animate numerous cultural, recreational and catechetical activities undertaken by many dioceses, parishes and religious institutions. From those beginnings a rich body of religious cinema has been produced, with a large number of films that have had significant influence on many people, albeit with the limitations that the passage of time, inevitably, tends to highlight.

Human and religious values that deserve attention and praise are often present, not only in films that make direct reference to the tradition of Christianity but also in films of different cultures and religions. This confirms the importance of the cinema as a vehicle for cultural exchange and as an invitation to openness and reflection in dealing with realities foreign to our upbringing and mentality. In this sense, the cinema serves to overcome distance and acquires that dignity particular to culture which is "a specific dimension of the existence and being of man. It creates among the persons within each community a complex of bonds, determining the interpersonal and social character of human existence" (John Paul II, Message for World Communications Day, 1984).

To those who work in the field of cinema, I would like to extend a warm invitation not to abandon this important cultural element, because it is not in accordance with the most authentic and deep demands and expectations of the human person to produce films which are devoid of content and which are aimed exclusively at entertainment, or have the sole motive of increasing the size of the audience.

As happens with all the media of social communication, the cinema, as well as having the power and the great merit of contributing to the cultural and human growth of the individual, can oppress freedom -- particularly of the most weak -- when it distorts the truth (cf. Pius XII, *Miranda prorsus*, 1957) and when it presents itself as the mirror of negative types of behavior, using scenes of violence and sex offensive to human dignity and "tending to excite violent emotions to stimulate the attention" of the viewer (John Paul II, Message for World Communications Day, 1981). The attitude of those who irresponsibly bring about degrading imitative behavior whose harmful effects can be read about each day in the pages of the newspapers cannot be defined as free artistic expression. As the Gospel reminds us, only in the Truth are we made free (cf. Jn 8:32).

The urgency of such a problem in our society, that seems too often to draw negative models from the daily stimuli offered by the cinema, as well as by television and by the newspapers, urges me to extend, once again, a pressing appeal both to those who are responsible for the industry -- so that they may commit themselves to working with professionalism and responsibility -- as well as to the viewers -- so that they may know how to react in a critical way in the face of the ever more demanding proposals offered by the world of the media, including the cinema, and be ready to judge between what may be an opportunity for growth, or an occasion of harm.

When the cinema, in obedience to one of its principal aims, presents us with an image of how we are as human beings, it must provide, from a basis in reality, worthwhile opportunities for reflection on the concrete conditions in which we live. It must therefore offer material for reflection on issues such as social commitment, and the condemnation of violence, of all forms of exclusion, of war and of injustice. These concerns, often dealt with by the cinema in its hundred-year history, cannot leave indifferent all those who are worried about the fate of humanity. This means encouraging those values that the Church has at heart and contributing directly to their spread through a medium which so easily and effectively reaches the public (cf. Pius XII, *The ideal film*, 1955).

On this day above all, on the threshold of the third millennium, it is essential to ask ourselves definite questions, not avoiding the problems but looking for answers and solutions. In this context there is no question of not giving the cinema the place and the value that is its due. However, I would appeal to the responsible persons at every level to be fully aware of the great influence that they exercise on people and of the mission that they are called upon to pursue at this present time which has such urgent need of universal assertions of peace and tolerance. This is simply to recall those values which are to be found at the heart of that dignity which has been given to each one of us by God the Creator.

Those that work in the sensitive field of cinema must as communicators remain open to dialogue and to the reality that surrounds them. They must undertake to highlight the most important realities with films that provoke reflection, in the awareness that this approach, which permits the drawing together of different cultures and of the people that live them, will bring about positive results for all.

In order to be sure that the messages that the cinema might offer for the human and spiritual growth of those who use it are fully understood, it is also important to take care of the education of viewers in the language of film which often departs from the direct representation of reality in order to use systems of symbols not always easy to comprehend. It is very useful when, even in school, teachers devote attention to this problem, sensitizing the students to images and gradually developing their critical attitude towards an idiom that is by now an integral part of our culture; because "the application of communications technology has been a mixed blessing, and its use for good purposes requires sound values and wise choices on the part of individuals, the private sector, governments, and society as a whole" (*Aetatis Novae*, 1992).

While the memory of the statements and of the reflections that accompanied the celebration of the Year of the Family just completed is still with us, I think it important to remind families that to them also is entrusted the duty of educating their children in an accurate reading and understanding of the films that enter their homes each day, thanks to television, and to the videocassette recorder which even the youngest children seem capable of using.

In the context of the necessary education of viewers, the social component of the cinema must not be forgotten. This could offer suitable opportunities for dialogue among those

that use the medium, through an exchange of opinions on the issue in question. It is also very useful -- especially for young people -- to organize film circles where, with the guidance of qualified persons, they may learn to express themselves and to listen to others, in a constructive and serene exchange of opinions.

Before concluding this message, I could not but draw attention to the distinctive duty that this matter of the cinema requires from all those who profess themselves to be Christians, who are aware of their own special mission in the world and who know well that their task is the proclamation of the Gospel, the good news of Jesus, "the Savior of all", to the people of their time.

The cinema, with its vast possibilities, could become a powerful means of evangelization. The Church urges directors, film-makers and all those involved who profess themselves to be Christians and who work in the complex and unique world of the cinema, to act in complete consistency with their own Faith and to take courageous initiatives -- even in the area of production -- in order that through their professionalism the Christian message that is for each man and woman the good news of salvation might be more present in the world.

The Church feels obliged to offer, above all to young people, that spiritual and moral help without which it becomes almost impossible to function in a worthwhile manner. It must take concrete steps, where necessary, with suitable initiatives of support and encouragement.

In the hope that these words could be for all a motive of reflection and an occasion of renewed commitment, I send from my heart a special blessing to all those who, with their different tasks, work in the cinema industry and also to those who endeavor to use the cinema as an authentic vehicle of culture for the integral growth of each person and of society as a whole.

XXX WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY – MAY 19, 1996

The Media: Modern Forum for Promoting the Role of Women in Society

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This year, the theme for World Communications Day, "The Media: Modern Forum for Promoting the Role of Women in Society", recognizes that the communications media play a crucial role not only in promoting justice and equality for women but in fostering appreciation for their specific feminine gifts, which elsewhere I have called the "genius" of women (cf. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 30; *Letter to Women*, 10).

Last year, in my Letter to Women, I sought to advance a dialogue, especially with women themselves, on what it means to be a woman in our time (cf. No. 1). I also pointed out some of "the obstacles which in so many parts of the world still keep women from being fully integrated into social, political and economic life" (No. 4). This is a dialogue which people in the communications media can, indeed have an obligation to, foster and support. People in the media often become advocates, and commendably so, of the voiceless and the marginalized. They are in a unique position also to stimulate public consciousness with regard to two serious issues concerning women in today's world.

First, as I noted in my Letter, motherhood is often penalized rather than rewarded, even though humanity owes its very survival to those women who have chosen to be wives and mothers (cf. No. 4). It is certainly an injustice that such women should be discriminated against, economically or socially, precisely for following that fundamental vocation. Likewise I pointed out that there is an urgent need to achieve real equality in every area: equal pay for equal work, protection for working mothers, fairness in career advancement, equality of spouses with regard to family rights, and the recognition of everything that is part of the rights and duties of citizens in a democratic State (cf. No. 4).

Secondly, the advancement of women's genuine emancipation is a matter of justice, which can no longer be overlooked; it is also a question of society's welfare. Fortunately, there is a growing awareness that women must be enabled to play their part in the solution of the serious problems of society and of society's future. In every area, "a

greater presence of women in society will prove most valuable, for it will help to manifest the contradictions present when society is organized solely according to the criteria of efficiency and productivity, and it will force systems to be redesigned in a way which favours the processes of humanization which mark the 'civilization of love'" (ibid., No. 4).

The "civilization of love" consists, most particularly, in a radical affirmation of the value of life and of the value of love. Women are especially qualified and privileged in both of these areas. Regarding life, although not alone responsible for affirming its intrinsic value, women enjoy a unique capacity for doing so because of their intimate connection with the mystery of life's transmission. Regarding love, women can bring to every aspect of life, including the highest levels of decision-making, that essential quality of femininity which consists in objectivity of judgment, tempered by the capacity to understand in depth the demands of interpersonal relationships.

The communications media, including the press, the cinema, radio and television, the music industry and computer networks, represent the modern forum where information is received and transmitted rapidly to a global audience, where ideas are exchanged, where attitudes are formed - and, indeed, where a new culture is being shaped. The media are therefore destined to exercise a powerful influence in determining whether society fully recognizes and appreciates not only the rights but also the special gifts of women.

Sadly though, we often see not the exaltation but the exploitation of women in the media. How often are they treated not as persons with an inviolable dignity but as objects whose purpose is to satisfy others' appetite for pleasure or for power? How often is the role of woman as wife and mother undervalued or even ridiculed? How often is the role of women in business or professional life depicted as a masculine caricature, a denial of the specific gifts of feminine insight, compassion and understanding, which so greatly contribute to the "civilization of love"?

Women themselves can do much to foster better treatment of women in the media: by promoting sound media education programmes, by teaching others, especially their families, to be discriminating consumers in the media market, by making known their views to production companies, publishers, broadcasting networks and advertisers with regard to programmes and publications which insult the dignity of women or debase their role in society. Moreover, women can and should prepare themselves for positions of responsibility and creativity in the media, not in conflict with or imitation of masculine roles but by impressing their own "genius" on their work and professional activity.

The media would do well to focus on the true heroines of society, including the saintly women of the Christian tradition, as role models for the young and for future generations. Nor can we forget, in this respect, the many consecrated women who have sacrificed all to follow Jesus and to dedicate themselves to prayer and to the service of the poor, the sick, the illiterate, the young, the old, the handicapped. Some of these women are themselves involved in the communications media - working so that "the poor have the Gospel preached to them" (cf. *Lk* 4:18).

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord" (*Lk* 1:46). The Blessed Virgin Mary used these words in responding to the salutation of her cousin Elizabeth, thus acknowledging the "great things" that God had done in her. The image of women communicated by the media should include the recognition that every feminine gift proclaims the greatness of the Lord, the Lord who has communicated life and love, goodness and grace, the Lord who is the source of the dignity and equality of women, and of their special "genius".

My prayer is that this Thirtieth World Communications Day will encourage all those involved in the media of social communication, especially the sons and daughters of the Church, to promote the genuine advancement of women's dignity and rights, by projecting a true and respectful image of their role in society, and by bringing out "the full truth about women" (*Letter to Women*, No. 12).

XXXI WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY – MAY 11, 1997

Communicating Jesus: the Way, the Truth and the Life

11 May 1997

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As the present century and millennium draw to a close, we see an unprecedented expansion of the means of social communications, with ever new products and services. We see the lives of more and more people being touched by the spread of new technologies of information and communication. Yet, there are still great numbers of people who have no access to the media, old or new.

Those who do benefit from this development experience an ever growing choice of sources. The greater the choice, the harder it may be to choose responsibly. The fact is that it is increasingly difficult to protect one's eyes and ears from images and sounds which arrive through the media unexpectedly and uninvited. It is particularly hard for parents to guard their children from unwholesome messages, and to ensure that their education in human relations and their learning about the world comes about in a way that is appropriate to their age and sensibility, and to their developing sense of right and wrong. Public opinion has been shocked at how easily the advanced communication technologies can be exploited by those whose intentions are evil. At the same time, can we not observe a relative slowness on the part of those who wish to do good to use the same opportunities?

We must hope that the gap between the beneficiaries of the new means of information and expression and those who as yet do not have access to them will not become another intractable source of inequity and discrimination. In some parts of the world voices are being raised against what is seen as domination of the media by so-called Western culture. Media products are seen as in some way representing values that the West holds dear and, by implication, they supposedly present Christian values. The truth of the matter may well be that the foremost value they genuinely represent is commercial profit.

In addition, the proportion of media programmes which deal with religious and spiritual aspirations, programmes which are morally uplifting and help people to live better lives,

is apparently decreasing. It is not easy to remain optimistic about the positive influence of the mass media when they appear either to ignore the vital role of religion in people's lives, or when the treatment that religious belief receives seems consistently negative and unsympathetic. Some elements of the media - especially in the entertainment sectors - often seem to wish to portray religious believers in the worst possible light. Is there still a place for Christ in the traditional mass media? May we claim a place for Him in the new media?

In the Church, the year 1997, as the first part of a three-year period of preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, is being devoted to reflection on Christ, the Word of God, made man by the power of the Holy Spirit (*cf. Tertio Millennio Adveniente, 30*). Appropriately therefore the theme of World Communications Day is "Communicating Jesus Christ: the Way, the Truth and the Life" (*cf. Jn 14:6*).

This theme provides an opportunity for the Church to meditate and act on the specific contributions which the communications media can offer in making known the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. It also provides an opportunity for professional communicators to reflect on how religious and specifically Christian themes and values can enrich media productions and the lives of those whom the media serve.

The modern media are addressed not only to society in general, but most of all to families, to young people and also to very young children. What "way" do the media point out? What "truth" do they propose? What "life" do they offer?

This is of concern not only to Christians, but to all people of good will.

The "way" of Christ is the way of a virtuous, fruitful and peaceful life as children of God and as brothers and sisters in the same human family; the "truth" of Christ is the eternal truth of God, who has revealed himself to us not only in the created world but also through Sacred Scripture, and especially in and through his Son, Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh; and the "life" of Christ is the life of grace, that free gift of God which is a created share in his own life and which enables us to live for ever in his love. When Christians are truly convinced of this, their lives are transformed. This transformation results not only in a credible and compelling personal witness but also in an urgent and effective communication - likewise through the media - of a living faith which paradoxically increases as it is shared.

It is consoling to know that all who bear the name Christian share this same conviction. With due respect for the communications activities of the individual Churches and Ecclesial Communities, it would be a significant ecumenical achievement if Christians could cooperate more closely with one another in the media as they prepare to celebrate the forthcoming Great Jubilee (*cf. Tertio Millennio Adveniente, 41*). Everything ought to focus on the primary objective of the Jubilee: the strengthening of faith and of Christian witness (*ibid., 42*).

Preparing for the 2000th Anniversary of the birth of the Saviour has become, as it were, the key to interpreting what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church and to the Churches at this time (*cf. ibid.*, 23). The mass media have a significant role to play in proclaiming and explaining this grace to the Christian community itself and to the world at large.

The same Jesus who is "the way, the truth and the life" is also "the light of the world" - the light that illumines our path, the light that enables us to perceive the truth, the light of the Son who gives us supernatural life here and hereafter. The two thousand years which have passed since the birth of Christ represent an extraordinary commemoration for humanity as a whole, given the prominent role played by Christianity during these two millennia (*cf. ibid.*, 15). It is surely appropriate that the mass media should pay tribute to that contribution.

Perhaps one of the finest gifts which we could offer to Jesus Christ on the two thousandth anniversary of his birth would be that the Good News will at last be made known to every person in the world - first of all through the living witness of Christian example, but also through the media: "Communicating Jesus Christ: the Way, the Truth and the Life". May this be the aim and commitment of all who profess the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, the source of life and truth (*cf. Jn 5:26; 10:10, 28*), and who have the privilege and the responsibility of working in the vast and influential world of social communications.

XXXII WORLD COMMUNICATIONS

DAY - JANUARY 24, 1998

Sustained by the Spirit, Communicate Hope

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. In this second of the three years leading to the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, we turn our attention to the Holy Spirit and to his action in the Church, in our lives and in the world. The Spirit is the "guardian of hope in the human heart" (*Dominum et Vivificantem*, 67). For this reason, then, the theme for the 32nd World Communications Day is "Sustained by the Holy Spirit Communicate Hope."

The hope in which the Spirit sustains believers is above all eschatological. It is hope for salvation - hope of heaven, hope for perfect communion with God. Such hope is, as the Letter to the Hebrews puts it, "a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf" (Heb 6:19-20).

2. But the eschatological hope dwelling in Christian hearts is deeply related to the search for happiness and fulfillment in this life. Hope of heaven stirs genuine concern for the well being of men and women here and now. "If any one says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 Jn 4:20). Redemption, which is God's healing of the divine-human relationship, goes hand in hand with the healing of our relationships with one another; and the hope born of the redemption looks to this double healing.

This is why it is so important that Christians prepare for the Great Jubilee of the dawn of the Third Millennium by renewing their hope in the final coming of the Kingdom of God, while also reading more perceptively the signs of hope found in the world around them. Among the signs of hope are these: scientific, technological and especially medical progress in the service of human life, a greater awareness of our responsibility for the environment, efforts to restore peace and justice where they have been violated, a desire for reconciliation and solidarity among peoples, particularly in the complex relationship between the North and South of the world. In the Church too there are many signs of hope, among them a more attentive listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit prompting the acceptance of charisms and the promotion of the laity, a deeper commitment to Christian

unity and a growing recognition of the importance of dialogue with other religions and with contemporary culture (cf. *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 46).

3. Christian communicators will communicate hope credibly if they first experience hope in their own lives, and this will happen only if they are men and women of prayer. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, prayer enables us to be "ready always with an answer to everyone who asks a reason for the hope" they see in us (1 Pt 3:15). This is how the Christian communicator learns to present the message of hope to the men and women of our times with the force of truth.

4. It can never be forgotten that communication through the media is not a utilitarian exercise intended simply to motivate, persuade or sell. Still less is it a vehicle for ideology. The media can at times reduce human beings to units of consumption or competing interest groups, or manipulate viewers and readers and listeners as mere ciphers from whom some advantage is sought, whether product sales or political support; and these things destroy community. It is the task of communication to bring people together and enrich their lives, not to isolate and exploit them. The means of social communication, properly used, can help to create and sustain a human community based on justice and charity; and, in so far as they do that, they will be signs of hope.

5. The means of social communication are indeed the new "Areopagus" of today's world - a great forum which, at its best, makes possible the exchange of truthful information, constructive ideas and sound values, and so creates community. This in turn challenges the Church in her approach to communications not only to use the media to spread the Gospel but actually to integrate the Gospel message into the 'new culture' created by modern communications, with their "new languages, new techniques and a new psychology" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 37).

Christian communicators need a formation which enables them to work effectively in a media environment of this kind. Such a formation will have to be comprehensive: training in technical skills; training in ethics and morality, with particular attention to values and norms relevant to their professional work; training in human culture, in philosophy, history, social sciences and aesthetics. But, before all else, it will have to be a formation in the interior life, the life of the spirit.

Christian communicators need to be men and women of Spirit-filled prayer, entering ever more deeply into communion with God in order to grow in their ability to foster communion among their fellow human beings. They must be schooled in hope by the Holy Spirit, "the principal agent of the new evangelization" (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 45), so that they can communicate hope to others.

The Virgin Mary is the perfect model of the hope which Christian communicators seek to stir in themselves and share with others. "Mary gave full expression to the longing of the poor of Yahweh and is a radiant model for those who entrust themselves with all their hearts to the promises of God" (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 48). As the Church takes her pilgrim path towards the Great Jubilee, we turn to Mary whose deep listening to the

Holy Spirit opened the world to the great event of the Incarnation, the source of all our hope.

XXXIII WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY – MAY 16, 1999

Mass Media: A Friendly Companion for those in Search of the Father

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. We are approaching the Great Jubilee, the two thousandth anniversary of the Birth of Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh, the celebration which will open the door to the third Christian millennium. In this last year of preparation, the Church turns to God our Father, contemplating *the mystery of his infinite mercy*. He is the God from whom all life comes and to whom it will return; and he is the One who journeys with us from birth to death as our friend and companion on the way.

I have chosen as the theme for this year's *World Communications Day* "Mass media: a friendly companion for those in search of the Father". The theme implies *two questions*: how might the media work with God rather than against him? and how might the media be a friendly companion to those searching for God's loving presence in their lives? It also implies *a statement of fact and a reason for thanks*: that the media do at times make it possible for those who are searching for God to read in new ways both the book of nature, which is the realm of reason, and the book of revelation, the Bible, which is the realm of faith. Finally the theme implies *an invitation and a hope*: that those responsible for the world of social communications will be ever more committed to help rather than hinder the search for meaning which is at the very heart of human life.

2. To be human is to go in search; and, as I stressed in my recent Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*, all human searching is in the end *a search for God*: "Faith and reason are like two wings upon which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth - in a word, to know himself - so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may come to know the truth of themselves" (1). The Great Jubilee will be a celebration of God who is the goal of all human searching, a celebration of the endless mercy which all men and women desire - even though they often find themselves thwarted by sin which, in the expression of Saint Augustine, is like looking for the right thing in the wrong place (cf. *Confessions*, X, 38). We sin when we look for God where he cannot be found.

Therefore, in speaking of "those who are searching for the Father", this year's theme for World Communications Day speaks of *every man and woman*. All are searching, though not all are looking in the right place. The theme recognizes the exceptional influence of the media in contemporary culture, and therefore the media's special responsibility to witness to the truth about life, about human dignity, about the true meaning of our freedom and mutual interdependence.

3. On the journey of human searching, the Church wishes to befriend the media, knowing that every form of cooperation will be for the good of everyone. Cooperation also means that we come to know each other better. At times, relations between the Church and the media can be marred by mutual misunderstanding which breeds fear and distrust. It is true that Church culture and media culture are different; indeed at certain points there is a stark contrast. But there is no reason why differences should make friendship and dialogue impossible. In many of the deepest friendships it is precisely differences that encourage creativity and bridge-building.

The Church's culture of *remembrance* can save the media culture of *transitory "news"* from becoming a forgetfulness which corrodes hope; and the media can help the Church to proclaim the Gospel in all its enduring freshness in the everyday reality of people's lives. 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. The Church's culture of *joy* can save the media culture of *entertainment* from becoming a soulless flight from truth and responsibility; and the media can help the Church to understand better how to communicate with people in a way that appeals and even delights. These are just some examples of how closer cooperation in a spirit of friendship and at a deeper level can help both the Church and the media to serve the men and women of our time in their search for meaning and fulfillment.

4. With the recent explosion of information technology, the possibility for communication between individuals and groups in every part of the world has never been greater. Yet, paradoxically, the very forces which can lead to better communication can also lead to increasing self-centeredness and alienation. We find ourselves therefore in a *time of both threat and promise*. Nobody of good will wants the threat to prevail in a way that will lead to still more human sorrow - least of all at the end of a century and a millennium which have had more than their share of sorrow.

Let us look instead with great hope to the new millennium, trusting that there will be people in both the Church and the media prepared to cooperate to ensure that the promise prevails over the threat, communication over alienation. This will ensure that the world of the media becomes a more and more friendly companion to all people, presenting them with "news" wedded to remembrance, information wedded to wisdom and entertainment wedded to joy. It will also ensure a world where the Church and the media can work together for the good of humanity. That is what is required if the power of the media is to be not a force which destroys but a love which creates, a love which reflects the love of God "who is Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (*Eph 4:6*).

May all who work in the world of social communications know the joy of divine companionship, so that in knowing the friendship of God they may be enabled to befriend all men and women on their journey to the house of the Father, to whom be honour and glory, praise and thanksgiving, with the Son and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever.

XXXIV WORLD COMMUNICATIONS

DAY – JUNE 4, 2000

Proclaiming Christ in the Media at the Dawn of a New Millennium

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The theme of the thirty-fourth World Communications Day, *Proclaiming Christ in the Media at the Dawn of the New Millennium*, is an invitation to look ahead to the challenges we face, and also back to the dawn of Christianity itself, for the light and courage we need. The substance of the message which we proclaim is always Jesus himself: "the whole of human history in fact stands in reference to him: our own time and the future of the world are illumined by his presence" (*Incarnationis Mysterium*, 1).

The early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles contain a moving account of the proclamation of Christ by his first followers - a proclamation at once spontaneous, faith-filled, and persuasive, and carried out through the power of the Holy Spirit.

First and most important, the disciples proclaim Christ in response to the mandate he had given them. Before ascending into heaven he tells the Apostles: "You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (*Acts* 1:8). And even though these are "uneducated, common men" (*Acts* 4:13), they respond quickly and generously.

Having spent time in prayer with Mary and other followers of the Lord, and acting at the Spirit's prompting, the Apostles begin the work of proclamation at Pentecost (cf. *Acts* 2). As we read about those marvellous events, we are reminded that the history of communication is a kind of journey, from the pride-driven project of Babel and the collapse into confusion and mutual incomprehension to which it gave rise (cf. *Gen* 11:1-9), to Pentecost and the gift of tongues: a restoration of communication, centred on Jesus, through the action of the Holy Spirit. Proclaiming Christ therefore leads to a meeting between people in faith and charity at the deepest level of their humanity; the Risen Lord himself becomes a medium of genuine communication among his brothers and sisters in the Spirit.

Pentecost is only the beginning. Even when threatened with reprisals, the Apostles are not deterred from proclaiming the Lord: "We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard," Peter and John tell the Sanhedrin (*Acts* 4:20). Indeed, trials themselves become instrumental to the mission. When a violent persecution breaks out in Jerusalem after Stephen's martyrdom, forcing Christ's followers to flee, "those who were scattered went about preaching the word" (*Acts* 8:4).

The living heart of the message which the Apostles preach is Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection - life triumphant over sin and death. Peter tells the centurion Cornelius and his household: "They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and made him manifest ... And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (*Acts* 10:39-43).

It goes without saying that circumstances have changed enormously in two millennia. Yet the same need to proclaim Christ still exists. Our duty to bear witness to the death and resurrection of Jesus and to his saving presence in our lives is as real and pressing as was the duty of the first disciples. We must tell the good news to all who are willing to listen.

Direct, personal proclamation - one person sharing faith in the Risen Lord with another - is essential; so are other traditional forms of spreading the word of God. But, alongside these, proclamation today must take place also in and through the media. "The Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means" (Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 45).

The impact of the media in today's world can hardly be exaggerated. The advent of the information society is a real cultural revolution, making the media "the first Areopagus of the modern age" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 37), where facts and ideas and values are constantly being exchanged. Through the media, people come into contact with other people and events, and form their opinions about the world they live in - indeed, form their understanding of the meaning of life. For many, the experience of living is to a great extent an experience of the media (cf. Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Aetatis Novae*, 2). The proclamation of Christ must be part of this experience.

Naturally, in proclaiming the Lord, the Church must make energetic and skilful use of her own means of communication - books, newspapers and periodicals, radio, television, and other means. And Catholic communicators must be bold and creative in developing new media and methods of proclamation. But, as much as possible, the Church also must use the opportunities that are to be found in the secular media.

Already the media contribute to spiritual enrichment in many ways - for example, the many special programmes being carried to worldwide audiences through satellite telecasts during the year of the Great Jubilee. In other cases, however, they display the indifference, even hostility, to Christ and his message that exist in certain sectors of secular culture. Often though, there is a need for a kind of "examination of conscience"

on the part of the media, leading to a more critical awareness of a bias or a lack of respect for people's religious and moral convictions.

Media presentations which call attention to authentic human needs, especially those of the weak, the vulnerable and the marginalized, can be an implicit proclamation of the Lord. But besides implicit proclamation, Christian communicators should also seek out ways to speak explicitly of Jesus crucified and risen, of his triumph over sin and death, in a manner suited to the medium used and to the capacities of audiences.

To do this well demands professional training and skill. But it also requires something more. In order to witness to Christ it is necessary to encounter him oneself and foster a personal relationship with him through prayer, the Eucharist and sacramental reconciliation, reading and reflection on God's word, the study of Christian doctrine, and service to others. And always, if it is authentic, this will be the Spirit's work much more than our own.

To proclaim Christ is not only a duty but a privilege. "The journey of believers towards the third millennium is in no way weighed down by the weariness which the burden of two thousand years of history could bring with it. Rather, Christians feel invigorated, in the knowledge that they bring to the world the true light, Christ the Lord. Proclaiming Jesus of Nazareth, true God and perfect Man, the Church opens to all people the prospect of being 'divinized' and thus of becoming more human" (*Incarnationis Mysterium*, 2).

The Great Jubilee of the 2000th anniversary of Jesus' birth at Bethlehem must be an opportunity and a challenge for the Lord's disciples to bear witness in and through the media to the extraordinary, consoling Good News of our salvation. In this "year of favour", may the media give voice to Jesus himself, clearly and joyously, with faith and hope and love. To proclaim Christ in the media at the dawn of the new millennium is not only a necessary part of the Church's evangelizing mission; it is also a vital, inspiring and hope-filled enrichment of the media's message. May God abundantly bless all those who honour and proclaim his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, in the vast world of the means of social communication.

XXXV WORLD COMMUNICATIONS

DAY – MAY 27, 2001

Preach from the Housetops: The Gospel in the Age of Global Communication

1. The theme which I have chosen for World Communications Day 2001 echoes the words of Jesus himself. It could not be otherwise, for it is Christ alone whom we preach. We remember his words to his first disciples: "What I tell you in the dark, utter in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim upon the housetops" (*Mt* 10:27). In the secret of our heart, we have listened to the truth of Jesus; now we must proclaim that truth from the housetops.

In today's world, housetops are almost always marked by a forest of transmitters and antennae sending and receiving messages of every kind to and from the four corners of the earth. It is vitally important to ensure that among these many messages the word of God is heard. To proclaim the faith from the housetops today means to speak Jesus' word in and through the dynamic world of communications.

2. In all cultures and at all times - certainly in the midst of today's global transformations - people ask the same basic questions about the meaning of life: Who am I? Where have I come from and where am I going? Why is there evil? What is there after this life?(cf. *Fides et Ratio*, 1). And in every age the Church offers the one ultimately satisfying answer to the deepest questions of the human heart - Jesus Christ himself, "who fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his high calling" (*Gaudium et spes*, 22). Therefore, the voice of Christians can never fall silent, for the Lord has entrusted to us the word of salvation for which every human heart longs. The Gospel offers the pearl of great price for which all are searching (cf. *Mt* 13:45-46).

It follows that the Church cannot fail to be ever more deeply involved in the burgeoning world of communications. The global communications network is extending and growing more complex by the day, and the media are having an increasingly visible effect on culture and its transmission. Where once the media reported events, now events are often shaped to meet the requirements of the media. Thus, the relationship between reality and the media has grown more intricate, and this is a deeply ambivalent phenomenon. On the one hand, it can blur the distinction between truth and illusion; but on the other, it can

open up unprecedented opportunities for making the truth more widely accessible to many more people. The task of the Church is to ensure that it is the latter which actually happens.

3. The world of the media can sometimes seem indifferent and even hostile to Christian faith and morality. This is partly because media culture is so deeply imbued with a typically postmodern sense that the only absolute truth is that there are no absolute truths or that, if there were, they would be inaccessible to human reason and therefore irrelevant. In such a view, what matters is not the truth but "the story"; if something is newsworthy or entertaining, the temptation to set aside considerations of truth becomes almost irresistible. As a result, the world of the media can sometimes seem no more friendly an environment for evangelization than the pagan world of the Apostles' day. But just as the early witnesses to the Good News did not retreat when faced with opposition, neither should Christ's followers do so today. The cry of Saint Paul echoes among us still: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 *Cor* 9:16).

Yet, as much as the world of the media may at times seem at odds with the Christian message, it also offers unique opportunities for proclaiming the saving truth of Christ to the whole human family. Consider, for instance, satellite telecasts of religious ceremonies which often reach a global audience, or the positive capacities of the Internet to carry religious information and teaching beyond all barriers and frontiers. Such a wide audience would have been beyond the wildest imaginings of those who preached the Gospel before us. What is therefore needed in our time is an active and imaginative engagement of the media by the Church. Catholics should not be afraid to throw open the doors of social communications to Christ, so that his Good News may be heard from the housetops of the world!

4. It is vital too that at the beginning of this new millennium we keep in mind the mission *ad gentes* which Christ has entrusted to the Church. An estimated two thirds of the world's six billion people do not in any real sense know Jesus Christ; and many of them live in countries with ancient Christian roots, where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or no longer consider themselves members of the Church and live lives far removed from the Lord and his Gospel (cf. *Redemptoris missio*, 33). Certainly, an effective response to this situation involves much more than the media; but in striving to meet the challenge Christians cannot possibly ignore the world of social communications. Indeed, media of every kind can play an essential role in direct evangelization and in bringing to people the truths and values which support and enhance human dignity. The Church's presence in the media is in fact an important aspect of the inculturation of the Gospel demanded by the new evangelization to which the Holy Spirit is summoning the Church throughout the world.

As the whole Church seeks to heed the Spirit's call, Christian communicators have "a prophetic task, a vocation: to speak out against the false gods and idols of the day - materialism, hedonism, consumerism, narrow nationalism..." (*Ethics in Communications*, 31). Above all, they have the duty and privilege to declare the truth - the glorious truth about human life and human destiny revealed in the Word made flesh. May Catholics

involved in the world of social communications preach the truth of Jesus ever more boldly and joyfully from the housetops, so that all men and women may hear about the love which is the heart of God's self-communication in Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and for ever (cf *Heb* 13:8).

XXXVI WORLD COMMUNICATIONS

DAY – MAY 12, 2002

Internet: A New Forum for Proclaiming the Gospel

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. The Church in every age continues the work begun on the day of Pentecost, when the Apostles, in the power of the Holy Spirit, went forth into the streets of Jerusalem to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ in many tongues (cf. *Acts 2:5-11*). Through the succeeding centuries, this evangelizing mission spread to the far corners of the earth, as Christianity took root in many places and learned to speak the diverse languages of the world, always in obedience to Christ's command to preach the Gospel to every nation (cf. Mt 28:19-20).

But the history of evangelization is not just a matter of geographic expansion, for the Church has also had to cross many cultural thresholds, each of which called for fresh energy and imagination in proclaiming the one Gospel of Jesus Christ. The age of the great discoveries, the Renaissance and the invention of printing, the Industrial Revolution and the birth of the modern world: these too were threshold moments which demanded new forms of evangelization. Now, with the communications and information revolution in full swing, the Church stands unmistakably at another decisive gateway. It is fitting therefore that on this World Communications Day 2002 we should reflect on the subject: "Internet: A New Forum for Proclaiming the Gospel".

2. The Internet is certainly a new "forum" understood in the ancient Roman sense of that public space where politics and business were transacted, where religious duties were fulfilled where much of the social life of the city took place, and where the best and the worst of human nature was on display. It was a crowded and bustling urban space, which both reflected the surrounding culture and created a culture of its own. This is no less true of cyberspace, which is as it were a new frontier opening up at the beginning of this new millennium. Like the new frontiers of other times, this one too is full of the interplay of danger and promise, and not without the sense of adventure which marked other great periods of change. For the Church the new world of cyberspace is a summons to the great adventure of using its potential to proclaim the Gospel message. This challenge is at the heart of what it means at the beginning of the millennium to follow the Lord's command to "put out into the deep": *Duc in altum!* (Lk 5:4).

3. The Church approaches this new medium with realism and confidence. Like other communications media, it is a means, not an end in itself. The Internet can offer magnificent opportunities for evangelization if used with competence and a clear awareness of its strengths and weaknesses. Above all, by providing information and stirring interest it makes possible an initial encounter with the Christian message, especially among the young who increasingly turn to the world of cyberspace as a window on the world. It is important, therefore, that the Christian community think of very practical ways of helping those who first make contact through the Internet to move from the virtual world of cyberspace to the real world of Christian community.

At a subsequent stage, the Internet can also provide the kind of follow-up which evangelization requires. Especially in an unsupportive culture, Christian living calls for continuing instruction and catechesis, and this is perhaps the area in which the Internet can provide excellent help. There already exist on the Net countless sources of information, documentation and education about the Church, her history and tradition, her doctrine and her engagement in every field in all parts of the world. It is clear, then, that while the Internet can never replace that profound experience of God which only the living, liturgical and sacramental life of the Church can offer, it can certainly provide a unique supplement and support in both preparing for the encounter with Christ in community, and sustaining the new believer in the journey of faith which then begins.

4. There are nevertheless certain necessary, even obvious, questions which arise in using the Internet in the cause of evangelization. The essence of the Internet in fact is that it provides an almost unending flood of information, much of which passes in a moment. In a culture which feeds on the ephemeral there can easily be a risk of believing that it is facts that matter, rather than values. The Internet offers extensive knowledge, but it does not teach values; and when values are disregarded, our very humanity is demeaned and man easily loses sight of his transcendent dignity. Despite its enormous potential for good, some of the degrading and damaging ways in which the Internet can be used are already obvious to all, and public authorities surely have a responsibility to guarantee that this marvellous instrument serves the common good and does not become a source of harm.

Furthermore, the Internet radically redefines a person's psychological relationship to time and space. Attention is rivetted on what is tangible, useful, instantly available; the stimulus for deeper thought and reflection may be lacking. Yet human beings have a vital need for time and inner quiet to ponder and examine life and its mysteries, and to grow gradually into a mature dominion of themselves and of the world around them. Understanding and wisdom are the fruit of a contemplative eye upon the world, and do not come from a mere accumulation of facts, no matter how interesting. They are the result of an insight which penetrates the deeper meaning of things in relation to one another and to the whole of reality. Moreover, as a forum in which practically everything is acceptable and almost nothing is lasting, the Internet favours a relativistic way of thinking and sometimes feeds the flight from personal responsibility and commitment.

In such a context, how are we to cultivate that wisdom which comes not just from information but from insight, the wisdom which understands the difference between right and wrong, and sustains the scale of values which flows from that difference?

5. The fact that through the Internet people multiply their contacts in ways hitherto unthinkable opens up wonderful possibilities for spreading the Gospel. But it is also true that electronically mediated relationships can never take the place of the direct human contact required for genuine evangelization. For evangelization always depends upon the personal witness of the one sent to evangelize (cf. *Rom* 10:14-15). How does the Church lead from the kind of contact made possible by the Internet to the deeper communication demanded by Christian proclamation? How do we build upon the first contact and exchange of information which the Internet makes possible?

There is no doubt that the electronic revolution holds out the promise of great positive breakthroughs for the developing world; but there is also the possibility that it will in fact aggravate existing inequalities as the information and communications gap widens. How can we ensure that the information and communications revolution which has the Internet as its prime engine will work in favour of the globalization of human development and solidarity, objectives closely linked to the Church's evangelizing mission?

Finally, in these troubled times, let me ask: how can we ensure that this wondrous instrument first conceived in the context of military operations can now serve the cause of peace? Can it favour that culture of dialogue, participation, solidarity and reconciliation without which peace cannot flourish? The Church believes it can; and to ensure that this is what will happen she is determined to enter this new forum, armed with the Gospel of Christ, the Prince of Peace.

6. The Internet causes billions of images to appear on millions of computer monitors around the planet. From this galaxy of sight and sound will the face of Christ emerge and the voice of Christ be heard? For it is only when his face is seen and his voice heard that the world will know the glad tidings of our redemption. This is the purpose of evangelization. And this is what will make the Internet a genuinely human space, for if there is no room for Christ, there is no room for man. Therefore, on this World Communications Day, I dare to summon the whole Church bravely to cross this new threshold, to put out into the deep of the Net, so that now as in the past the great engagement of the Gospel and culture may show to the world "the glory of God on the face of Christ" (*2 Cor* 4:6). May the Lord bless all those who work for this aim.

XXXVII WORLD COMMUNICATIONS

DAY – JUNE 1, 2003

The Communications Media at the Service of Authentic Peace in the Light of “Pacem in Terris”

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. In the dark days of the Cold War, Blessed Pope John XXIII's Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris* came as a beacon of hope to men and women of good will. Declaring that authentic peace requires "diligent observance of the divinely established order" ([*Pacem in Terris*, 1](#)), the Holy Father pointed to truth, justice, charity and freedom as the pillars of a peaceful society (*ibid.*, 37).

The emergence of the power of modern social communications formed an important part of the Encyclical's background. Pope John XXIII had the media especially in mind when he called for "fairness and impartiality" in the use of "instruments for the promotion and spread of mutual understanding between nations" afforded by science and technology; he decried "ways of disseminating information which violate the principles of truth and justice, and injure the reputation of another nation" (*ibid.*, 90).

2. Today, as we observe the fortieth anniversary of *Pacem in Terris*, the division of peoples into opposing blocs is mostly a painful memory, but peace, justice and social stability are still lacking in many parts of the world. Terrorism, conflict in the Middle East and other regions, threats and counter-threats, injustice, exploitation, and assaults upon the dignity and sanctity of human life both before and after birth are dismaying realities of our times.

Meanwhile, the power of the media to shape human relationships and influence political and social life, both for good and for ill, has enormously increased. Hence the timeliness of the theme chosen for the Thirty-seventh World Day of Communications: "The Communications Media at the Service of Authentic Peace in the Light of *Pacem in Terris*". The world and the media still have much to learn from the message of Blessed Pope John XXIII.

3. Media and Truth. The fundamental moral requirement of all communication is respect for and service of the truth. Freedom to seek and speak what is true is essential to human communication, not only in relation to facts and information but also, and especially, regarding the nature and destiny of the human person, regarding society and the common good, regarding our relationship with God. The mass media have an inescapable responsibility in this sense, since they constitute the modern arena in which ideas are shared and people can grow in mutual understanding and solidarity. This is why Pope John XXIII defended the right "to freedom in investigating the truth and - within the limits of the moral order and the common good - to freedom of speech and publication" as necessary conditions for social peace ([*Pacem in Terris*](#), 12).

In fact, the media often do render courageous service to the truth; but sometimes they function as agents of propaganda and disinformation in the service of narrow interests, national, ethnic, racial, and religious prejudices, material greed and false ideologies of various kinds. It is imperative that the pressures brought to bear on the media to err in such ways be resisted first of all by the men and women of the media themselves, but also by the Church and other concerned groups.

4. Media and Justice. Blessed Pope John XXIII spoke eloquently in *Pacem in Terris* of the universal human good - "the good, that is, of the whole human family" (No.132) - in which every individual and all peoples have a right to share.

The global outreach of the media carries with it special responsibilities in this regard. While it is true that the media often belong to particular interest groups, private and public, the very nature of their impact on life requires that they must not serve to set one group against another - for example, in the name of class conflict, exaggerated nationalism, racial supremacy, ethnic cleansing, and the like. Setting some against others in the name of religion is a particularly serious failure against truth and justice, as is discriminatory treatment of religious beliefs, since these belong to the deepest realm of the human person's dignity and freedom.

By accurately reporting events, correctly explaining issues and fairly representing diverse points of view, the media have a strict duty to foster justice and solidarity in human relationships at all levels of society. This does not mean glossing over grievances and divisions but getting at their roots so that they can be understood and healed.

5. Media and Freedom. Freedom is a precondition of true peace as well as one of its most precious fruits. The media serve freedom by serving truth: they obstruct freedom to the extent that they depart from what is true by disseminating falsehoods or creating a climate of unsound emotional reaction to events. Only when people have free access to true and sufficient information can they pursue the common good and hold public authority accountable.

If the media are to serve freedom, they themselves must be free and correctly use that freedom. Their privileged status obliges the media to rise above purely commercial concerns and serve society's true needs and interests. Although some public regulation of

the media in the interests of the common good is appropriate, government control is not. Reporters and commentators in particular have a grave duty to follow the demands of their moral conscience and to resist pressures to "adapt" the truth to satisfy the demands of wealth or political power.

As a practical matter, ways must be found not only to give the weaker sectors of society access to the information which they need for their individual and social development, but also to ensure that they are not excluded from having an effective and responsible role in deciding media content and determining the structures and policies of social communications.

6. Media and Love. "The anger of man does not work the righteousness of God" (*James* 1:20). At the height of the Cold War, Blessed Pope John XXIII expressed this simple but profound thought on what the path to peace entailed: "The preservation of peace will have to be dependent on a radically different principle from the one which is operative at the present time. True peace among nations must depend not on the possession of an equal supply of weapons, but solely upon mutual trust" (*Pacem in Terris*, 113).

The communications media are key actors in today's world, and they have an immense role to play in building that trust. Their power is such that in a few short days they can create the positive or negative public reaction to events which suits their purposes. Reasonable people will realize that such enormous power calls for the highest standards of commitment to truth and goodness. In this sense the men and women of the media are especially bound to contribute to peace in all parts of the world by breaking down the barriers of mistrust, fostering consideration of the point of view of others, and striving always to bring peoples and nations together in mutual understanding and respect - and beyond understanding and respect, to reconciliation and mercy!

"Where hatred and the thirst for revenge dominate, where war brings suffering and death to the innocent, there the grace of mercy is needed in order to settle human minds and hearts and to bring about peace" (*Homily at the Shrine of Divine Mercy at Krakow-Lagiewniki*, 17 August 2002, No.5).

Challenging as all this is, it is by no means asking too much of the men and women of the media. For by vocation as well as by profession they are called to be agents of truth, justice, freedom, and love, contributing by their important work to a social order "founded on truth, built up on justice, nurtured and animated by charity, and brought into effect under the auspices of freedom" (*Pacem in Terris*, 167). My prayer therefore on this year's World Communications Day is that the men and women of the media will ever more wholly live up to the challenge of their calling: service of the universal common good. Their personal fulfillment and the peace and happiness of the world depend greatly on this. May God bless them with light and courage.

XXXVIII WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY – MAY 23, 2004

The Media and the Family: A Risk and a Richness

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. The extraordinary growth of the communications media and their increased availability has brought exceptional opportunities for enriching the lives not only of individuals, but also of families. At the same time, families today face new challenges arising from the varied and often contradictory messages presented by the mass media. The theme chosen for the 2004 World Communications Day – “The Media and the Family: A Risk and a Richness” - is a timely one, for it invites sober reflection on the use which families make of the media and, in turn, on the way that families and family concerns are treated by the media.

This year’s theme is also a reminder to everyone, both communicators and those whom they address, that all communication has a moral dimension. As the Lord himself has said, it is from the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks (cf. Mt 12:34-35). People grow or diminish in moral stature by the words which they speak and the messages which they choose to hear. Consequently, wisdom and discernment in the use of the media are particularly called for on the part of communications professionals, parents and educators, for their decisions greatly affect children and young people for whom they are responsible, and who are ultimately the future of society.

2. Thanks to the unprecedented expansion of the communications market in recent decades, many families throughout the world, even those of quite modest means, now have access in their own homes to immense and varied media resources. As a result, they enjoy virtually unlimited opportunities for information, education, cultural expansion, and even spiritual growth - opportunities that far exceed those available to most families in earlier times.

Yet these same media also have the capacity to do grave harm to families by presenting an inadequate or even deformed outlook on life, on the family, on religion and on morality. This power either to reinforce or override traditional values like religion, culture, and family was clearly seen by the Second Vatican Council, which taught that “if the media are to be correctly employed, it is essential that all who use them know the

principles of the moral order and apply them faithfully” ([*Inter Mirifica*](#), 4). Communication in any form must always be inspired by the ethical criterion of respect for the truth and for the dignity of the human person.

3. These considerations apply in particular to the treatment of the family in the media. On the one hand, marriage and family life are frequently depicted in a sensitive manner, realistic but also sympathetic, that celebrates virtues like love, fidelity, forgiveness, and generous self-giving for others. This is true also of media presentations which recognize the failures and disappointments inevitably experienced by married couples and families - tensions, conflicts, setbacks, evil choices and hurtful deeds - yet at the same time make an effort to separate right from wrong, to distinguish true love from its counterfeits, and to show the irreplaceable importance of the family as the fundamental unit of society.

On the other hand, the family and family life are all too often inadequately portrayed in the media. Infidelity, sexual activity outside of marriage, and the absence of a moral and spiritual vision of the marriage covenant are depicted uncritically, while positive support is at times given to divorce, contraception, abortion and homosexuality. Such portrayals, by promoting causes inimical to marriage and the family, are detrimental to the common good of society.

4. Conscientious reflection on the ethical dimension of communications should issue in practical initiatives aimed at eliminating the risks to the well-being of the family posed by the media and ensuring that these powerful instruments of communication will remain genuine sources of enrichment. A special responsibility in this regard lies with communicators themselves, with public authorities, and with parents.

Pope Paul VI pointed out that professional communicators should “know and respect the needs of the family, and this sometimes presupposes in them true courage, and always a high sense of responsibility” ([*Message for the 1969 World Communications Day*](#)). It is not so easy to resist commercial pressures or the demands of conformity to secular ideologies, but that is what responsible communicators must do. The stakes are high, since every attack on the fundamental value of the family is an attack on the true good of humanity.

Public authorities themselves have a serious duty to uphold marriage and the family for the sake of society itself. Instead, many now accept and act upon the unsound libertarian arguments of groups which advocate practices which contribute to the grave phenomenon of family crisis and the weakening of the very concept of the family. Without resorting to censorship, it is imperative that public authorities set in place regulatory policies and procedures to ensure that the media do not act against the good of the family. Family representatives should be part of this policy-making.

Policy-makers in the media and in the public sector also must work for an equitable distribution of media resources on the national and international levels, while respecting the integrity of traditional cultures. The media should not appear to have an agenda hostile to the sound family values of traditional cultures or the goal of replacing those

values, as part of a process of globalization, with the secularized values of consumer society.

5. Parents, as the primary and most important educators of their children, are also the first to teach them about the media. They are called to train their offspring in the “moderate, critical, watchful and prudent use of the media” in the home (*Familiaris Consortio*, 76). When parents do that consistently and well, family life is greatly enriched. Even very young children can be taught important lessons about the media: that they are produced by people anxious to communicate messages; that these are often messages to do something - to buy a product, to engage in dubious behaviour - that is not in the child’s best interests or in accord with moral truth; that children should not uncritically accept or imitate what they find in the media.

Parents also need to regulate the use of media in the home. This would include planning and scheduling media use, strictly limiting the time children devote to media, making entertainment a family experience, putting some media entirely off limits and periodically excluding all of them for the sake of other family activities. Above all, parents should give good example to children by their own thoughtful and selective use of media. Often they will find it helpful to join with other families to study and discuss the problems and opportunities presented by the use of the media. Families should be outspoken in telling producers, advertisers, and public authorities what they like and dislike.

6. The media of social communications have an enormous positive potential for promoting sound human and family values and thus contributing to the renewal of society. In view of their great power to shape ideas and influence behaviour, professional communicators should recognize that they have a moral responsibility not only to give families all possible encouragement, assistance, and support to that end, but also to exercise wisdom, good judgment and fairness in their presentation of issues involving sexuality, marriage and family life.

The media are welcomed daily as a familiar guest in many homes and families. On this World Communications Day I encourage professional communicators and families alike to acknowledge this unique privilege and the accountability which it entails. May all engaged in the field of communications recognize that they are truly “stewards and administrators of an immense spiritual power that belongs to the patrimony of mankind and is meant to enrich the whole of the human community” (*Address to Communications Specialists*, Los Angeles, 15 September 1987, 8). And may families always be able to find in the media a source of support, encouragement and inspiration as they strive to live as a community of life and love, to train young people in sound moral values, and to advance a culture of solidarity, freedom and peace.

XXXIX WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY – JANUARY 24, 2005

The Communications Media: At the Service of Understanding Among Peoples

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. We read in the Letter of Saint James, "From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so" (*Jas* 3:10). The Sacred Scriptures remind us that words have an extraordinary power to bring people together or to divide them, to forge bonds of friendship or to provoke hostility.

Not only is this true of words spoken by one person to another: it applies equally to communication taking place at any level. *Modern technology places at our disposal unprecedented possibilities for good, for spreading the truth of our salvation in Jesus Christ and for fostering harmony and reconciliation.* Yet its misuse can do untold harm, giving rise to misunderstanding, prejudice and even conflict. The theme chosen for the 2005 World Communications Day - "The Communications Media: At the Service of Understanding Among Peoples" - addresses an urgent need: to promote the unity of the human family through the use made of these great resources.

2. One important way of achieving this end is through education. The media can teach billions of people about other parts of the world and other cultures. With good reason they have been called "the first Areopagus of the modern age . . . for many the chief means of information and education, of guidance and inspiration in their behaviour as individuals, families, and within society at large" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 37). Accurate knowledge promotes understanding, dispels prejudice, and awakens the desire to learn more. Images especially have the power to convey lasting impressions and to shape attitudes. They teach people how to regard members of other groups and nations, subtly influencing whether they are considered as friends or enemies, allies or potential adversaries.

When others are portrayed in hostile terms, seeds of conflict are sown which can all too easily escalate into violence, war, or even genocide. Instead of building unity and understanding, the media can be used to demonize other social, ethnic and religious

groups, fomenting fear and hatred. Those responsible for the style and content of what is communicated have a grave duty to ensure that this does not happen. Indeed, *the media have enormous potential for promoting peace and building bridges between peoples, breaking the fatal cycle of violence, reprisal, and fresh violence that is so widespread today.* In the words of Saint Paul, which formed the basis of this year's [Message for the World Day of Peace](#): "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (*Rom 12:21*).

3. If such a contribution to peace-making is one of the significant ways the media can bring people together, its influence in favour of the swift mobilization of aid in response to natural disasters is another. It was heartening to see how quickly the international community responded to the recent tsunami that claimed countless victims. The speed with which news travels today naturally increases the possibility for timely practical measures designed to offer maximum assistance. In this way the media can achieve an immense amount of good.

4. The Second Vatican Council reminded us: "If the media are to be correctly employed, it is essential that all who use them know the principles of the moral order and apply them faithfully" ([Inter Mirifica](#), 4).

The fundamental ethical principle is this: "The human person and the human community are the end and measure of the use of the media of social communication; communication should be by persons to persons for the integral development of persons" ([Ethics in Communications](#), 21). In the first place, then, the communicators themselves need to put into practice in their own lives the values and attitudes they are called to instill in others. Above all, this must include a genuine commitment to the common good - a good that is not confined by the narrow interests of a particular group or nation but embraces the needs and interests of all, the good of the entire human family (cf. [Pacem in Terris](#), 132). *Communicators have the opportunity to promote a true culture of life by distancing themselves from today's conspiracy against life* (cf. [Evangelium Vitae](#), 17) and conveying the truth about the value and dignity of every human person.

5. The model and pattern of all communication is found in the Word of God himself. "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (*Heb 1:1*). The Incarnate Word has established a new covenant between God and his people - a covenant which also joins us in community with one another. "For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility" (*Eph 2:14*).

My prayer on this year's World Communications Day is that the men and women of the media will play their part in *breaking down the dividing walls of hostility in our world*, walls that separate peoples and nations from one another, feeding misunderstanding and mistrust. May they use the resources at their disposal to strengthen the bonds of friendship and love that clearly signal the onset of the Kingdom of God here on earth.

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