



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
FOR THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF
THE INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC FILM ORGANIZATION**

Tuesday, 31 October 1978

To Fr Lucien Labelle President of the International Catholic Film Organization

At the beginning of our Pontificate, we are happy to join in the golden jubilee of the International Catholic Film Organization, celebrated at the Hague. The ecclesial presence that this institution tries to ensure at the heart of the vast production of films, deserves, in fact, to be encouraged, in order to help our contemporaries and the whole of society to benefit really, on the human and spiritual planes, from the development of this important sector and to overcome the risks it involves. You can also help the Church to understand and use better the resources of this "seventh art" for her mission of salvation.

It was the merit of your predecessors to have realized what was at stake and to have succeeded in drawing the particular attention of Christians to film creativity. This action was not long in receiving the encouragement of the Holy See in order to set it on the plane of the universal Church: we are thinking particularly of Pope Pius XII, who showed great solicitude in this field (cf. *Address to Representatives of the Italian Film Industry*, 21 June 1955: AAS 47, [1955], 501-512). And the Second Vatican Council came to enlighten and stimulate this apostolate of social communications, laying the foundations of the pastoral Instruction "[Communio et Progressio](#)". You are right to draw from it unceasingly the dynamism and orientations that your responsibilities call for.

Certainly, the O.C.I.C. has not an easy task to be fully faithful to its vocation; and the methods of its action may sometimes be appraised in different ways, as personal sensitiveness attaches itself to this or that aspect. Now this ecclesial institution must welcome and promote the attempts of the modern cinema with the lucidity and understanding that this specific art requires. It must at the

same time bear witness freely to the human and spiritual values demanded by Christian morality, often recalled by the Magisterium. We are anxious to express to you the gratitude of the Church for the work that has been accomplished in this direction. But the jubilee of your Organization must, above all, bring about an impetus towards the tasks to come. We hope, on the one hand, that the different authorities will improve further the competence and apostolic quality of their service. And we trust, on the other hand, that they will find more and more, among themselves and with the Holy See, precisely in the O.C.I.C., the consultation that will give their action the force of a more and more far-reaching Catholic commitment. We deem it opportune to entrust to your consideration some fundamental points.

To speak of the cinema is, in the first place, to call to mind the very complex sector of creativity and of film production. A real dialogue must be established here between the Church and the world of the cinema: you are already, and you can increasingly be, its qualified and effective architects. May you contribute to the bringing forth of a new mentality which accepts that priorities be clearly established! Here are some subjects on which you could meditate deeply with producers and actors: do they seek the promotion of real human values? Do they give religious and specifically Christian values their rightful place? You can at least insist that the latter should not be omitted or underestimated. What a responsibility for the Church and also what a hope, continually to encourage a return to a film production that is humanly worthy of the name!

Another series of reflections would be necessary today, although it concerns a delicate problem, governed by the law of commerce: do the organs for the distribution of films sufficiently take into account the dignity and convictions of those for whom they are intended? In fact, technically advanced countries spread too often—and young nations seem to accept too easily—a number of questionable film productions, without caring about the cultural, ethnic, and historical differences of the audiences.

But the apostolate of the O.C.I.C. must aim even more at the formation of educators and users, in order to enable them to benefit with discernment from the sequences proposed to them and, with full knowledge of the facts, to intervene with those responsible.

Finally, the challenge of evangelization, which the two recent Synods of Bishops have highlighted, should also bring forth more numerous initiatives in this field of the cinema. It is a question of creating films, even modest ones, with a short running-time, to bear witness directly to the faith of the Church. Many interesting productions have already appeared—and we congratulate their authors. But Christian communities, in spite of the poverty of their means, should not hesitate to invest more in this important sector, at the time of the "civilization of the image". In the past, our sanctuaries were filled with religious mosaics, paintings, and sculptures, to teach the faith. Shall we have enough spiritual strength and genius to create "moving images", of great quality, and adapted to the culture of today? It is a question not only of the first proclamation of the faith in a world that is often very secularized, or of catechesis to deepen this faith, but it is a question of the

inculturation of the Gospel Message at the level of each people, of each cultural tradition.

A particular reflection is suggested to us by the subject that the international Authorities have chosen for the coming year: the advancement of the child. Children and young people are, in fact, the privileged users, and also those most exposed, with regard to the good and the harm done by film production. The recent Synod also considered them as those to whom catechesis is addressed in a particular way. You will know how to grant them a special place in your solicitude. On this fiftieth anniversary, we wish the O.C.I.C. fruitful activity, in deep communion with the Bishops and the whole of the Church. And we willingly give our Apostolic Blessing to the members of this Organization and to all those who work with them in order that the cinema may serve the human and spiritual progress of their brothers.

From the Vatican, 31 October 1978.

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