



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL COMMISSION
FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS**

Friday 4 March 1994

*Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

1. It always a pleasure for me to meet the members of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications on the occasion of your Plenary Meeting. This year, your assembly marks the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of this particular fruit of the Second Vatican Council. The Fathers of the Council were fully aware of the importance of the communications media, and in the Decree "Inter Mirifica" they asked for the annual celebration of a "World Communications Day" and for the establishment of an Office to consider questions, theoretical and practical, relating to the media especially press, radio, cinema and television. Just three months after the promulgation of "Inter Mirifica" Pope Paul VI established that special department of the Roman Curia, which thus became one of the first visible results of the Council.

The problems and opportunities which existed thirty years ago in the field of social communications have an even greater urgency now. Now as then, the principal task of your Council is to explore ways in which the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ can be more effectively communicated through the marvellous instruments of contact and interaction between human beings which modern technology has made available to almost everyone.

2. A very evident but perhaps not sufficiently appreciated task in this regard is that of maintaining a positive and constructive relationship - a continuing dialogue with the communications media. There are many men and women of goodwill in the media who realize that the Church in the name

of Christ unselfishly seeks to serve the poor, the sick, the young and those who are too easily forgotten. They are open to reporting these stories and to supporting these efforts - if only they are told about them in a way which will elicit solidarity in the hearts of communicators themselves and their vast audiences. This work of public relations is valid for all the media, not only for the world of news reporting, but also for the media of cinema, theatre, videocassettes and audio recordings, which are hungry for ideas and perhaps even more hungry for the truths and values which give meaning and purpose to life and to every human endeavour.

3. So many of the masterpieces of painting, sculpture and architecture which you see around you in this city of Rome are clear evidence that the mysteries of faith and the transcendent truth about man can be presented with great power by the arts. One striking example which immediately comes to mind as we await its unveiling after the work of restoration is Michelangelo's fresco of "The Last Judgment" in the Sistine Chapel, which speaks with great eloquence and immediacy of that day when Christ "the Judge will take his seat and all that is hidden will be revealed" (*Sequentia Dies Irae*). The material reality of the fresco, because it is a work of human genius, raises the spectator's heart and mind to reflect on the transcendent reality of man's ultimate dependence on God, our loving Creator and our just Judge.

In our own day there are new art forms, which are not restricted to static - even if powerful - depictions in paint, plaster and stone. Can the epic of Christian faith and love not also be told in an attractive way via these forms - on television and theatre screens, via the radio and recordings? What more should Christians be doing to inspire and stimulate today's media to create masterpieces which can rival those which surround us here, in their spiritual power to transmit a message which can deeply touch the human heart?

4. The Catholic presence in the media is a way of fulfilling the Church's mission of proclaiming the Kingdom of God and inviting all to enter (*Marc. 1, 15*). It is an expression of evangelical love and pastoral concern. Especially in this "Year of the Family", artists and media personnel should be challenged to create works which will inspire a richer, deeper and more fruitful family life. Human love has been one of the most powerful themes in literature and drama throughout history, and the pre-eminent beauty of human love in family life offers an inexhaustible source of inspiration for the creative imagination. The unselfish sacrifices which husbands and wives make for one another and for their children, and the loving response of those children, can provide inspiration to creative artists in the media, as well as to audiences open to messages which sustain hope and elevate the spirit.

In my Message for this year's "World Communications Day" I discussed the impact which the means of social communications, especially television, can have on families. That Message sought to offer guidance in the use of television to enrich individual and family life, and in the avoidance of what can damage the moral fabric of the family and of society itself. Likewise, the communications media have the potential to make us realize that we are all members of the one

human family. The media can be powerful promoters of understanding and unity among peoples; they can elicit expressions of solidarity with those who suffer through natural disasters or violent conflicts; they can help make the joys and sufferings of our brothers and sisters around the world our own joys and sufferings. Both the news and entertainment media can be our eyes and ears, open to the world, and can offer insight into the longings and aspirations, as well as the difficulties and frustrations of the entire human family.

5. In your reflections during these days, you have seen that the Christian message has been and can be presented in many ways in the communications media, not least through the example, personal integrity and faith of committed Catholics in all parts of the world. To them and especially to you here today, and to your families and associates, I impart my Apostolic Blessing, and I pray that - through the communications media - the Good News of Jesus Christ will be more widely heard and accepted.