



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE CATHOLIC UNION
OF THE ITALIAN PRESS**

To Dr Emilio Rossi

President of the Catholic Union of the Italian Press

1. At the end of the initiative *Children and the media: 100 meeting points*, promoted by the Catholic Union of the Italian Press of which you are President, I would like to greet you and all the participants, and express my great appreciation for all that your association does.

The many conferences on the topic of "Children and the Media" that are being held in many Italian cities using the variety of media for the presentations have helped to give the agents and users of the media a better idea of the widespread impact of the *media's* presence in society. Such a massive presence raises new problems and presents a real challenge for families, educators, operators and all who have at heart the future of the young generations.

2. The rapid diffusion of the *media* undeniably offers children greater possibilities for learning and knowledge. It is right to recognize and appreciate these *positive* elements, although *certain problems* have emerged that call for your careful reflection.

Television often becomes the main formative agent for children, impressing on them unhealthy values and information that influence their development negatively, especially when they spend a great deal of time in front of the screen which virtually takes the place of their parents. While everyone seems to agree that all forms of exploitation of minors by the media should be banned, it should be recognized that few *special programmes* are actually designed for them. It is therefore urgent to produce programmes which take into account the sensitivity and educational needs of children and respect the pedagogical dynamics and ethical values.

3. We should consider that children, on their own or with their parents, also watch *ordinary*

programmes. It is useful to rate the programmes on the scale of how they confirm or depart from family values, but in no way should it mean that families are the only ones who need to exercise responsibility. Indeed, it is not enough to keep them from watching television; instead, they should be offered better *quality* media products, especially television programmes, that *do not need to be forbidden*. Programmes are needed that foster personal development, give a sense of personal goodness and help people even to face life's difficult moments without trauma or distortion. Above all, it is urgently necessary to promote through the *media* values and personalities who incarnate the fundamental truths about the human person and the important questions they raise. Among other things, religious truths should be carefully presented so they be seen to offer suitable answers to the deeper questions a person asks as he is growing up.

4. At the beginning of my Pontificate, in the context of the International Year of the Child, I said that there are enormous possibilities and means that adults can use to teach and entertain their children. Grown-ups can stimulate the minds of children to listen, lull them to sleep or - God forbid - poison them irremediably (cf. [*Message for World Day of Social Communications*](#), 27 May 1979, *ORE*, 28 May 1979, p. 9). This is a serious responsibility and here we must apply Christ's harshest words as a warning against scandalizing the little ones and the weak (cf. Mt 18,6).

Paying attention to children in the context of the *media* turns out to be one of the important proofs of a great civilization and its progress. It is an exalted work to which all must contribute in accord with their specialized role and skills. This work is part of that social pedagogy through which we can shape the new generations and help them to express all the good that lies hidden in their hearts, without harming it or making it dry up.

From this point of view, the new *media* such as the *Internet* and the multimedia technology have an extraordinary potential: they are more widespread and interactive, and demand additional skills and call for the exercise of responsibility on the part of the organisms that are deputed to look after the common good. With the coming of these new media we find ourselves at a "decisive gateway", as I recalled in my [*Message for the 36th World Communications Day*](#) to be celebrated next 12th of May, dedicated to the theme: *The Internet: a New Forum for Proclaiming the Gospel*. We must "cross this threshold bravely" with both discernment and initiative, if we want to guarantee to future generations an environment that is safe from manipulation and abuse.

5. Lastly, I would like to use this opportunity to *appeal* to those who exercise responsibility in the world of communications. I ask *government leaders* and *institutions* for the protection of *children* to make respect for the rights of children the primary and indispensable criterion in evaluating how the *media* operate. I ask *parents* to exercise careful attention to how their children are being educated, both at home and in social groups. I ask *media* communicators and in particular *editors* and *producers* to invest in programmes that are good for children not forgetting how children think and act.

As I thank the *representatives of the Catholic Union of the Italian Press* for what they are doing, I encourage them to continue to involve more people in promoting a new, richer social and cultural season that will give life to a constructive and careful relationship between the media and children. May Jesus' special love for children (cf. Mk 10,13-16), whom he showed to be an example of how to enter his Kingdom (cf. Mt 18,3-4), be an example and an incentive to each one to encourage communications that are appropriate for men and women, attentive to the common good and especially to the good of children.

May the Virgin Mary be close with motherly care to all who are involved in such an important mission that has a huge impact on the formation of young people. As I assure you of my prayers for each of you, I cordially impart my Blessing to you.

From the Vatican, 18 April 2002.

JOHN PAUL II