



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II FOR THE 39th WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY

"The Communications Media: At the Service of Understanding Among Peoples"

[Sunday, 8 May 2005]

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" (James 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 instil 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.

From the Vatican, 24 January 2005, the Feast of Saint Francis de Sales.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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