



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II FOR THE 17TH WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY

"Social Communications and the Promotion of Peace"

[Sunday, 15 May 1983]

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.11).

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 recognizable 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.

From the Vatican, 25 March 1983.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II