



# The Holy See

---

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

*March 4, 1999*

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

I am happy to welcome you, the members, consultors, experts and staff of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications on the occasion of your Plenary Assembly. I greet especially Cardinal Andrzej Maria Deskur, President Emeritus of the Council, and Archbishop John Foley, his successor as President. I am grateful for the presence as well of Cardinal Eugenio de Araujo Sales and Cardinal Hyacinthe Thiandoum, who have contributed so much to the work of the Council from its earliest days.

This year marks the thirty-fifth anniversary of the document *In Fructibus Multis*, which responded to the request of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council that the Holy See establish a special commission for social communications: thus, a founding document of your Pontifical Council. The Fathers saw clearly that if there was to be a genuine colloquium salutis between the Church and the world, then a prime place had to be given to the use of the media, which were growing in sophistication and scope at the time of the Council and which have become still more influential in our own day. This is also the twenty-fifth year of one of your Council's best-known initiatives, the telecast of the Christmas Midnight Mass from Saint Peter's Basilica, now one of the most widely followed religious programmes in the world. I am truly grateful to all who contribute to this and other such broadcasts, which are an admirable service of the proclamation of the word of God and a particular help to the Successor of Peter in his universal ministry of truth and unity.

These anniversaries highlight the value of close and positive cooperation between the Church and the media (cf. Message for the Thirty-Third World Day of Social Communications, 3). This collaboration will doubtless be taken a significant step forward in the Year 2000, as the grace of

the Great Jubilee is carried to the four corners of the earth. The two thousandth anniversary of the Lord's birth will be celebrated with special prominence in Rome and the Holy Land, but its spiritual significance extends to all peoples and places (cf. *Incarnationis Mysterium*, 2). I greatly appreciate all that the Pontifical Council is doing to make the media more aware

of the genuine character of the Jubilee as a - year of favour of the Lord -, and to ensure that the celebrations connected with the Jubilee will be broadcast as widely and effectively as possible, and in a way that communicates the Jubilee's message of conversion, hope and joy.

A vital aspect of cooperation between the Church and the media is the ethical reflection which the Church proposes, without which the world of social communications, potentially so creative, can harbour and spread destructive counter-values. It is heartening to learn that, since the publication of the document *Ethics in Advertising*, a suggestion has come from people in the media that there be a similar document offering ethical guidance in other areas of communications. In a field where cultural and financial pressures can sometimes blur the moral vision which should guide all human realities and relationships, this task represents a challenge for the Pontifical Council. But it is one that is deeply in tune with the Church's essential mission to spread the Good News of God's kingdom.

The Church's moral teaching is the fruit of a long tradition of ethical wisdom reaching back to the Lord Jesus himself, and through him to Mount Sinai and to the mystery of God's self-revelation in human history. Without this vision and obedience to its demands there will be neither the understanding nor the joy which represent the fullness of God's blessings to his creatures. I therefore encourage you to pursue your study of the ethical dimension of media culture and of the power of the media over people's lives and over society in general. I urge you to continue to promote effective training of Catholics involved in the media on every continent, so that their work will be not only professionally sound but also a commitment to the apostolate. Your continuing cooperation with the various international Catholic media organizations has particular significance in the vast field of the Church's evangelizing mission.

I am confident that the dedicated work of your Pontifical Council will continue to encourage and guide Catholics involved in social communications and, specifically in relation to the celebration of the Great Jubilee, will result in bringing this major ecclesial event to the widest possible audience. I entrust you to the loving intercession of Mary, Seat of Wisdom and Mother of all our joys: may she who gave the Word to the world teach us to serve humbly and proclaim confidently the saving message of her Son. As a pledge of strength and peace in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh that we might live, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

---

