



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II FOR THE 33rd WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY

"Mass media: a friendly companion for those in search of the Father"

[Sunday, 16 May 1999]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. We are approaching the Great Jubilee, the two thousandth anniversary of the Birth of Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh, the celebration which will open the door to the third Christian millennium. In this last year of preparation, the Church turns to God our Father, contemplating *the mystery of his infinite mercy*. He is the God from whom all life comes and to whom it will return; and he is the One who journeys with us from birth to death as our friend and companion on the way.

I have chosen as the theme for this year's *World Communications Day* "Mass media: a friendly companion for those in search of the Father". The theme implies *two questions*: how might the media work with God rather than against him? and how might the media be a friendly companion to those searching for God's loving presence in their lives? It also implies *a statement of fact and a reason for thanks*: that the media do at times make it possible for those who are searching for God to read in new ways both the book of nature, which is the realm of reason, and the book of revelation, the Bible, which is the realm of faith. Finally the theme implies *an invitation and a hope*: that those responsible for the world of social communications will be ever more committed to help rather than hinder the search for meaning which is at the very heart of human life.

2. To be human is to go in search; and, as I stressed in my recent Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*, all human searching is in the end *a search for God*: "Faith and reason are like two wings upon which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth - in a word, to know himself - so that, by knowing and loving God, men

and women may come to know the truth of themselves" (1). The Great Jubilee will be a celebration of God who is the goal of all human searching, a celebration of the endless mercy which all men and women desire - even though they often find themselves thwarted by sin which, in the expression of Saint Augustine, is like looking for the right thing in the wrong place (cf. *Confessions*, X, 38). We sin when we look for God where he cannot be found.

Therefore, in speaking of "those who are searching for the Father", this year's theme for World Communications Day speaks of *every man and woman*. All are searching, though not all are looking in the right place. The theme recognizes the exceptional influence of the media in contemporary culture, and therefore the media's special responsibility to witness to the truth about life, about human dignity, about the true meaning of our freedom and mutual interdependence.

3. On the journey of human searching, the Church wishes to befriend the media, knowing that every form of cooperation will be for the good of everyone. Cooperation also means that we come to know each other better. At times, relations between the Church and the media can be marred by mutual misunderstanding which breeds fear and distrust. It is true that Church culture and media culture are different; indeed at certain points there is a stark contrast. But there is no reason why differences should make friendship and dialogue impossible. In many of the deepest friendships it is precisely differences that encourage creativity and bridge-building.

The Church's culture of *remembrance* can save the media culture of *transitory "news"* from becoming a forgetfulness which corrodes hope; and the media can help the Church to proclaim the Gospel in all its enduring freshness in the everyday reality of people's lives. The Church's culture of *wisdom* can save the media culture of *information* from becoming a meaningless accumulation of facts; and the media can help the Church's wisdom to remain alert to the array of new knowledge now emerging. The Church's culture of *joy* can save the media culture of *entertainment* from becoming a soulless flight from truth and responsibility; and the media can help the Church to understand better how to communicate with people in a way that appeals and even delights. These are just some examples of how closer cooperation in a spirit of friendship and at a deeper level can help both the Church and the media to serve the men and women of our time in their search for meaning and fulfilment.

4. With the recent explosion of information technology, the possibility for communication between individuals and groups in every part of the world has never been greater. Yet, paradoxically, the very forces which can lead to better communication can also lead to increasing self-centredness and alienation. We find ourselves therefore in a *time of both threat and promise*. Nobody of good will wants the threat to prevail in a way that will lead to still more human sorrow - least of all at the end of a century and a millennium which have had more than their share of sorrow.

Let us look instead with great hope to the new millennium, trusting that there will be people in both the Church and the media prepared to cooperate to ensure that the promise prevails over the

threat, communication over alienation. This will ensure that the world of the media becomes a more and more friendly companion to all people, presenting them with "news" wedded to remembrance, information wedded to wisdom and entertainment wedded to joy. It will also ensure a world where the Church and the media can work together for the good of humanity. That is what is required if the power of the media is to be not a force which destroys but a love which creates, a love which reflects the love of God "who is Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph 4:6).

May all who work in the world of social communications know the joy of divine companionship, so that in knowing the friendship of God they may be enabled to befriend all men and women on their journey to the house of the Father, to whom be honour and glory, praise and thanksgiving, with the Son and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever.

24 January 1999, the Feast of Saint Francis de Sales

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