



The Holy See

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

Thursday, 15 March 1990

*Dear Brother Bishops,
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

1. It gives me great pleasure to have this meeting with the members and staff of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications on the occasion of your Plenary Assembly. My special welcome goes to the new members who have graciously consented to give of their time and talents in furthering the important work of this Council.

As you know, this Dicastery was established at the specific request of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council in the conviction that the modern means of social communication, if used properly, can "contribute greatly to the enlargement and enrichment of people's minds and to the spreading and consolidation of the kingdom of God" (*Inter Mirifica*, 2). Today more than ever, the promise as well as the challenge of social communications summons human societies and the Church herself to greater attention and effort in this field. This is especially so in light of the urgent need being experienced in all parts of the world for spiritual, social and cultural development.

2. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe, for example, offer unprecedented opportunities for proclaiming the Word of God through the media. We must seek to satisfy the hunger and thirst for religious truth and instruction of those who for many years have had a press, radio and television that gave little space to specifically Christian themes. Opportunities are now being offered for printing religious news and reflections, and for broadcasting and televising significant religious events, to the great joy of many. By providing accurate information and a forum for the exchange of views, the media can also further the dialogue and participation that are essential for

democratic life and social development.

In Western Europe, and to a certain extent in North America, the changes wrought by new communications policies and technologies create new challenges for the Church. As indicated in the "Criteria for Ecumenical and Interreligious Cooperation in the Media", recently published by this Pontifical Council, Catholics must work together with other Christians and with all believers to guarantee the right of a religious presence in the media. The air waves in particular are a public trust in which private profit is subordinate to the service of the common good. They should be used in such a way that they genuinely contribute to the integral well-being of the human person. Later this month, Bishops and others involved in media work in Europe will gather at Fatima to reflect on some of these same concerns. Through the intercession of Our Lady of Fatima, may their meeting be fruitful for a rediscovery of the common Christian roots of European culture and for a new evangelization of this continent.

3. Turning our attention to Latin America, we find that the Church there is making a renewed effort to preach the gospel in preparation for the Five Hundredth Anniversary of the first evangelization of the western hemisphere. There, as in Europe and elsewhere, we recognize ever more clearly that evangelization is not an effort which, once made, need not be repeated. Indeed, in every time and place the Church is constantly evangelizing herself so that, purified and renewed, she may fulfil her mission to live the Gospel and bring it to others.

Today, in fulfilling this task of evangelization, the ecclesial community can make use of forms of social communication which did not exist five centuries ago. I am pleased to note that the Church in Latin America is taking concrete steps to develop a computer network for the dissemination of information on Christian faith and culture. As I stated in my Message for this year's World Communications Day: "In the new 'computer culture', the Church can more readily inform the world of her beliefs and explain the reasons for her stance on any given issue or event". How much more can and should be done, by creative efforts in the communications media, to strengthen and deepen the living witness to the faith of so many Catholics in Latin America!

4. In Africa too there is a pressing need for evangelization through the communications media. This has prompted the Symposium of Bishops' Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) to schedule a special continental meeting in July exclusively on this theme. I am confident that this meeting will lead to greater awareness and effective action in employing the means of social communications for the Church's mission of preaching the Gospel to all people. The media are also important for the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops. Through their creative use, information can be shared and participation of the faithful increased in preparation for this important event.

The fact that the Church in Asia constitutes a small minority among so many peoples presents a special challenge in the use of the media. Evangelization and pre-evangelization can be greatly

supported by a more committed effort in this field. A forthcoming meeting of representatives of Bishops of Asia, scheduled to take place in Indonesia in July, will be an occasion for reflection on the Church's presence in the media in this vast continent.

5. Finally, I wish to mention the document "Pornography and Violence in the Media: A Pastoral Response", published last year by this Pontifical Commission. Addressing public officials, media professionals and families, the document offers wise guidelines and encouragement for healthy initiatives and sound programming in publications, films, telecasts and videocassettes. It likewise urges those involved in these activities to protect all members of society, especially women and children, from base exploitation.

The document concludes with the words of Saint Paul: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (*Rom.* 12, 21). There is indeed much that needs to be done to overcome evil with good in every area of communications: films, radio and television, as well as the new culture of the computer.

As you direct your efforts to this important task, I pray that the Holy Spirit will fill your minds and hearts with wisdom and perseverance. To all of you and your loved ones I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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