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# Communication | N F O

FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES - OFFICE OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

P.O. Box 2036, Manila 1099 Philippines

Tel: (+63 2) 732 7170, 338 7769 Fax: (+63 2) 732 7171

Email: [fabc\\_osc@pltdsl.net](mailto:fabc_osc@pltdsl.net)

Vol. XXI, Nos. 2&3

Feb/Mar 2006

## 40th World Communication Day

*Theme* > **The Media: A Network for Communication,  
Communion and Cooperation**

*Sunday May 28, 2006*

### MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. In the wake of the fortieth-anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, I am happy to recall its Decree on the Means of Social Communication, *Inter Mirifica*, which in particular recognized the power of the media to influence the whole of human society. The need to harness that power for the benefit of all mankind has prompted me, in this my first message for World Communications Day, to reflect briefly on the idea of the media as a network facilitating communication, communion, and cooperation.

Saint Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, vividly depicts our human vocation to be “sharers in the divine nature” (*Dei Verbum*, 2); through Christ we have access in one Spirit to the Father; so we are no longer strangers and aliens but citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, growing into a holy temple, a dwelling place for God (cf. *Eph 2:18-22*). This sublime portrayal of a life of communion engages all aspects of our lives as Christians. The call to be true to the self-communication of God in Christ is in fact a call to recognize his dynamic force within us, which then seeks to spread outwards to others, so that his love can truly become the prevalent measure of the world (cf. *Homily for World Youth Day*, Cologne, 21 August 2005).

2. Technological advances in the media have in certain respects conquered time and space, making communication between people, even when separated by vast distances, both instantaneous and direct. This development presents an enormous potential for service of the common good and “constitutes a patrimony to safeguard and promote” (*Rapid Development*, 10). Yet, as we all know, our world is far from perfect. Daily we are reminded that immediacy of communication does not necessarily translate into the building of cooperation and communion in society.

To inform the consciences of individuals and help shape their thinking is never a neutral task. Authentic communication demands principled courage and resolve. It requires a determination of those working in the media not to wilt under the weight of so much information nor even to be content with partial or provisional truths. Instead it necessitates both seeking and transmitting what is the ultimate foundation and meaning of human, personal and social existence (cf. *Fides et Ratio*, 5). In this way the media can contribute constructively to the propagation of all that is good and true.

3. The call for today’s media to be responsible - to be the protagonist of truth and promoter of the peace that ensues - carries with it a number of challenges. While the various instruments of social communication facilitate the exchange of information, ideas, and mutual understanding among groups, they are also tainted by ambiguity. Alongside the provision of a “great round table” for dialogue, certain tendencies within the media engender a kind of monoculture that dims creative genius, deflates the subtlety of complex thought and undervalues the specificity of cultural practices and the particularity of religious belief. These are distortions that occur when the media industry becomes self-serving or solely profit-driven, losing the sense of accountability to the common good.

Accurate reporting of events, full explanation of matters of public concern, and fair representation of diverse points of view must, then, always be fostered. The need to uphold and support marriage and family life is of particular importance, precisely because it pertains to the foundation of every culture and society (cf. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11). In cooperation with parents, the social communications and entertainment industries can assist in the difficult but sublimely satisfying vocation of bringing up children, through presenting edifying models of human life and love (cf. *Inter Mirifica*, 11). How disheartening and destructive it is to us all when the opposite occurs. Do not our hearts cry out, most especially, when our young people are subjected to debased or false expressions of love which ridicule the God-given dignity of every human person and undermine family interests?

4. To encourage both a constructive presence and a positive perception of the media in society, I wish to reiterate the importance of three steps, identified by my venerable predecessor Pope John Paul II, necessary for their service of the common good: formation, participation, and dialogue (cf. *Rapid Development*, 11).

Formation in the responsible and critical use of the media helps people to use them intelligently and appropriately. The profound impact upon the mind of new vocabulary and of images, which the electronic media in particular so easily introduce into society, cannot be overestimated. Precisely because contemporary media shape popular culture, they themselves must overcome any temptation to manipulate, especially the young, and instead pursue the desire to form and serve. In this way they protect rather than erode the fabric of a civil society worthy of the human person.

Participation in the mass media arises from their nature as a good destined for all people. As a public service, social communication requires a spirit of cooperation and co-responsibility with vigorous accountability of the use of public resources and the performance of roles of public trust (cf. *Ethics in Communications*, 20), including recourse to regulatory standards and other measures or structures designed to effect this goal.

Finally, the promotion of dialogue through the exchange of learning, the expression of solidarity and the espousal of peace presents a great opportunity for the mass media which must be recognized and exercised. In this way they become influential and appreciated resources for building the civilization of love for which all peoples yearn.

I am confident that serious efforts to promote these three steps will assist the media to develop soundly as a network of communication, communion and cooperation, helping men, women and children, to become more aware of the dignity of the human person, more responsible, and more open to others especially the neediest and the weakest members of society (cf. *Redemptor Hominis*, 15; *Ethics in Communications*, 4).

In conclusion, I return to the encouraging words of Saint Paul: Christ is our peace. In him we are one (cf. *Eph 2:14*). Let us together break down the dividing walls of hostility and build up the communion of love according to the designs of the Creator made known through his Son!

*From the Vatican, 24 January 2006, the Feast of Saint Francis de Sales.*



Benedictus PP XVI

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“Those who practise charity in the Church’s name ... realize that a pure and generous love is the best witness to the God in whom we believe and by whom we are driven to love. A Christian knows when it is time to speak of God and when it is better to say nothing and to let love alone speak. He knows that God is love (cf. *1 Jn 4:8*) and that God’s presence is felt at the very time when the only thing we do is to love. He knows... that disdain for love is disdain for God and man alike; it is an attempt to do without God. Consequently, the best defence of God and man consists precisely in love. It is the responsibility of the Church’s charitable organizations to reinforce this awareness in their members, so that by their activity—as well as their words, their silence, their example—they may be credible witnesses to Christ.”

— Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* 31c (2005, no. 31c)

## COMMENTARY/ REFLECTION

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*“I return to the encouraging words of Saint Paul: Christ is our peace. In him we are one (cf. Eph 2:14). Let us together break down the dividing walls of hostility and build up the communion of love according to the designs of the Creator made known through his Son!” (Benedict XVI, Message for the 40th World Communications Day)*

This year marks the first World Communications Day message of Pope Benedict XVI, and the 40th such document since a worldwide celebration was called for in the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council’s Decree, *Inter Mirifica*, on the Means of Social Communication.

Pope Benedict has chosen to focus on the great potential of the media in serving the common good and “the idea of the media as a network facilitating communication, communion and cooperation”.

He offers a New Testament insight into the roots of this network of communion by quoting from the letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians: “through Christ we have access in one Spirit to the Father; so we are no longer strangers and aliens but citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, growing into a holy temple, a dwelling place for God.” (cf. Eph 2:18-22). He notes that our recognition of God’s communication of himself in Christ, should lead us to share the good news of his love and mercy, so that it can be known, experienced and lead to greater communion and cooperation.

The Holy Father recognizes how technology has helped bring down barriers of time and space, making communication instantaneous and direct, and thereby offering great potential for serving the common good. However, he also acknowledges that these new means of communication do not automatically bring about greater cooperation or communion. Instead, how we communicate needs to be addressed, since “authentic communication demands principled courage and resolve” both to communicate truth and enlighten humanity on “what is the ultimate foundation and meaning of human, personal and social existence”.

In examining the call of the media to be responsible to the public trust given them, and ideally to be protagonists of truth and promoters of peace, the Pope notes some of the trends challenging this duty: adherence to “a kind of monoculture that dims creative genius”, oversimplification of complex thought and difficult issues, and undervaluing cultural and religious values. The pressures of self interest and financial gain can be a root cause of what he terms these “distortions”.

To respond to these trends, the Pope encourages the media to do their utmost in accurately reporting events, offering complete accounts on matters of public concern and giving fair representation of diverse points of view. He underscores especially the importance of supporting marriage and the family, the most fundamental building block of every culture and society, by “presenting edifying models of human life and love” and doing away with “debased or false expressions of love which ridicule the God-given dignity of every human person”.

In conclusion, recalling *The Rapid Development*, the last Apostolic Letter of Pope John Paul II, he restates the importance of formation, participation and dialogue as ways of serving the common good. Formation involves responsible and critical use of the media on the part of the consumer and more attention on the part of the provider in avoiding any temptation to manipulate. Participation calls to mind the sense of responsibility and accountability, especially since the media are a good destined for all people, and, therefore, require special attention in respecting the public trust. Finally, the media can promote dialogue by allowing for a balanced exchange of ideas, by showing gestures of solidarity or efforts to promote peace. All these steps, if taken seriously and put into practice, can help develop a greater awareness of the dignity of the human person, and especially the weakest members of society, to build up a civilization of love.

## READINGS

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### FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

Isaiah 2:3: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.”

Deuteronomy 6:5-7: “You must love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength. Let the words I enjoin on you today stay in your heart. You shall tell them to your children, and keep on telling them.”

### RESPONSORIAL PSALMS

Psalms 25:4-5: “Direct me in your ways, Yahweh, and teach me your paths. Encourage me to walk in your truth and teach me since you are the God who saves me”

Psalms 82:3-4: “Let the weak and the orphan have justice, be fair to the wretched and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy, save them from the clutches of the wicked”

Psalms 133:1: “How good, how delightful it is to live as brothers all together”

### FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT

Ephesians 2:18-22: "Through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father."

Ephesians 2:14-17: "For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity"

Hebrews 1:1-3: At many moments in the past and by many means, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but in our time, the final days, he has spoken to us in the person of his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the ages. He is the reflection of God's glory and bears the impress of God's own being, sustaining all things by his powerful command."

Timothy 2:15: "Make every effort to present yourself before God as a proven worker who has no need to be ashamed, but who keeps the message of truth on a straight path."

### GOSPELS

John 14:16-17: "I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete to be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth whom the world can never accept since it neither sees nor knows him; but you know him, because he is with you, he is in you."

John 15:4: "Remain in me, as I in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me."

Matthew 7:24: "Therefore, everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on rock."

Matthew 12:37: "It is by your words you will be justified, and by your words condemned."

John 17:17-19: "Consecrate them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world and for their sake I consecrate myself so that they too may be consecrated in truth."

John 18:37: "I came into the world for this, to bear witness to the truth; and all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice."

John 13:34: "I give you a new commandment: love one another; you must love one another just as I have loved you."

### PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

CELEBRANT: Our world today is often marked by divisions, polarization and an unwillingness to listen to one another, a reality often reflected in the media which can mirror or create trends in society. In this year's Message for World Communications Day, the Pope encourages us to hear the words of St. Paul that "Christ is our peace. In him we are one." Let us pray to the Lord that helps us to break down the dividing walls of hostility and build up the communion of love leading to true communication, communion and cooperation.

READER:

For the Holy Father, Benedict XVI, for our Bishop and for all the pastors of the Church, that the Lord will help them in their ministry of preaching the Good News to all people, we pray to the Lord... *R: Lord, hear our prayer.*

That communities of believers may be filled with the Holy Spirit, who unites us in fellowship and love, and guides us to seeing, understanding and transmitting all that is true and good, we pray to the Lord ... *R: Lord, hear our prayer.*

For parents of families and teachers, that they may help young people become discerning consumers of the media, and may insist on content which uplifts and enhances the dignity of the human person, we pray to the Lord ... *R: Lord, hear our prayer.*

For children and young people, who are often shaped by the new media, that they may resonate with all that is good, authentic and dignified, and reject or be protected from all that degrades, divides or locks them into a spiritual void of virtual reality, we pray to the Lord ... *R: Lord, hear our prayer.*

For those in charge of the media and for those who work in them, that they may work with courage and resolve to communicate truthfully, fairly, and responsibly, we pray to the Lord... *R: Lord, hear our prayer.*

For public authorities, that they may be ever more conscious of their role in overseeing the public trust given them, especially in holding the media accountable to its responsibility to be truly a network for communication, communion and cooperation, we pray to the Lord ... *R: Lord, hear our prayer.*

CELEBRANT: Lord, we humbly ask you to hear the prayers of this assembly, and to give us confirmation and hope that our trust in your word and everlasting love will guide us and sustain us in promoting authentic communication, communion and cooperation, in living out our Christian vocation to know and love you and one another.