

FAITH AND REASON

Communicating the way, truth and life: Dear Brothers and Sisters, As the present century and millennium draw to a close, we see an unprecedented expansion of the means of social communications, with ever new products and services. We see the lives of more and more people being touched by the spread of new technologies of information and communication. Yet, there are still great numbers of people who have no access to the media, old or new.

Those who do benefit from this development experience an ever-growing choice of sources. The greater the choice, the harder it may be to choose responsibly. The fact is that it is increasingly difficult to protect one's eyes and ears from images and sounds which arrive through the media unexpectedly and uninvited. It is particularly hard for parents to guard their children from unwholesome messages, and to ensure that their education in human relations and their learning about the world comes about in a way that is appropriate to their age and sensibility, and to their developing sense of right and wrong. Public opinion has been shocked at how easily the advanced communication technologies can be exploited by those whose intentions are evil. At the same time, can we not observe a relative slowness on the part of those who wish to do good to use the same opportunities?

We must hope that the gap between the beneficiaries of the new means of information and expression and those who as yet do not have access to them will not become another intractable source of inequity and discrimination. In some parts of the world voices are being raised against what is seen as domination of the media by so-called Western culture. Media products are seen as in some way representing values that the West holds dear and, by implication, they supposedly present Christian values. The truth of the matter may well be that the foremost value they genuinely represent is commercial profit.

In addition, the proportion of media programs which deal with religious and spiritual aspirations, programs which are morally uplifting and help people to live better lives, is apparently decreasing. It is not easy to remain optimistic about the positive influence of the mass media when they appear either to ignore the vital role of religion in people's lives, or when the treatment that religious belief receives seems consistently negative and unsympathetic. Some elements of the media - especially in the entertainment sectors - often seem to wish to portray religious believers in the worst possible light. Is there still a place for Christ in the traditional mass media? May we claim a place for Him in the new media?

In the Church, the year 1997, as the first part of a three-year period of preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, is being devoted to reflection on Christ, the Word of God, made man by the power of the Holy Spirit. Appropriately therefore the theme of World Communications Day is "Communicating Jesus Christ: the Way, the Truth and the Life".

This theme provides an opportunity for the Church to meditate and act on the specific contributions which the communications media can offer in making known the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. It also provides an opportunity for professional communicators to reflect on how religious and specifically Christian themes and values can enrich media productions and the lives of those whom the media serve.

The modern media are addressed not only to society in general, but most of all to families, to young people and also to very young children. What "way" do the media point out? What "truth" do they propose? What "life" do they offer? This is of concern not only to Christians, but to all people of good will.

The "way" of Christ is the way of a virtuous, fruitful and peaceful life as children of God and as brothers and sisters in the same human family; the "truth" of Christ is the eternal truth of God, who has revealed himself to us not only in the created world but also through Sacred Scripture, and especially in and through his Son, Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh; and the "life" of Christ is the life of grace, that free gift of God which is a created share in his own life and which enables us to live forever in his love. When Christians are truly convinced of this, their lives are transformed. This transformation results not only in a credible and compelling personal witness but also in an urgent and effective communication - likewise through the media - of a living faith which paradoxically increases as it is shared.

It is consoling to know that all who bear the name Christian share this same conviction. With due respect for the communications activities of the individual Churches and Ecclesial Communities, it would be a significant ecumenical achievement if Christians could cooperate more closely with one another in the media as they prepare to celebrate the forthcoming Great Jubilee. Everything ought to focus on the primary objective of the Jubilee: the strengthening of faith and of Christian witness.

Preparing for the 2000th Anniversary of the birth of the Savior has become, as it were, the key to interpreting what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church and to the Churches at this time. The mass media have a significant role to play in proclaiming and explaining this grace to the Christian community itself and to the world at large... **From the Vatican, 24 January 1997, the Feast of Saint Francis de Sales.**

We Ought to Deny Ourselves and Imitate Christ Through Bearing the Cross: MY CHILD, the more you depart from yourself, the more you will be able to enter into Me. As the giving up of exterior things brings interior peace, so the forsaking of self-unites you to God. I will have you learn perfect surrender to My will, without contradiction or complaint. Follow Me. I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Without the Way, there is no going. Without the Truth, there is no knowing. Without the Life, there is no living. I am the Way which you must follow, the Truth which you must believe, the Life for which you must hope. I am the inviolable Way, the infallible Truth, the unending Life. I am the Way that is straight, the supreme Truth, the Life that is true, the blessed, the uncreated Life. If you abide in My Way you shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free, and you shall attain life everlasting. If you wish to enter into life, keep My commandments. If you will know the truth, believe in Me. If you will be perfect, sell all. If you will be My disciple, deny yourself. If you will possess the blessed life, despise this present life. If you will be exalted in heaven, humble yourself on earth. If you wish to reign with Me, carry the Cross with Me. For only the servants of the Cross find the life of blessedness and of true light. **Imitation of Christ - Bk.3, Chapter 56**

Bonds of Peace: In his address to the United Nations on October 4,1965, Pope Paul VI stated a profound truth when he said "Peace, as you know, is not built up only by means of politics or the balance of forces or interests. It is constructed with the mind, with ideas, with works of peace. The products of the mind - ideas - the products culture, and the creative forces of peoples are meant to be shared. Strategies of peace that remain on the scientific and technical level and merely measure out balances and verify controls will never be sufficient for real peace unless bonds that link peoples to one another are forged and strengthened. Build up the links that unite people together. Build up the means that will enable people and nations to share their culture and values with one another. Put aside the narrow interests that leave one nation at the mercy of another economically, socially, politically. **(Pope John Paul II, Letter to the General Assembly of the United Nations, June 11,1982)**

A Thought For the Day

Sunday Christianity is not a life insurance policy from which one benefits only by dying.
Monday We should not consider ourselves just because we think we are.
Tuesday Be cautious in choosing friends and be even more cautious in changing them.
Wednesday If you need to make a choice and do not make it, that in itself is a decision.
Thursday We must convert our love for Christ into deeds.
Friday What is defeat? it is nothing but education, the first step to something greater.
Saturday The soul cannot live without love. All depends on providing it with a worthy object.

Faith: Faith does indeed tell us what the senses do not tell but does not contradict their findings. It transcends but does not contradict them. Pascal repeats, "Faith is the gift from God." I think it is also the same thing that the poet William Blake, whom I so admire, calls the imagination. You know, we have got, as it were, mind blocks. So much has been achieved by human intelligence that we have got lost in it. Whereas this other dimension that Blake calls the imagination and that Pascal calls faith is the thing that we most desperately need... **Malcolm Muggeridge**

Eternal, Holy God, I come to You burdened with worries, fears, doubts, and troubles. Calm and quiet me with peace of mind. Empty me of the anxiety that disturbs me, of the concerns that weary my spirit, and weight heavy on my heart. Loosen my grip on the disappointments and grievances I hold on to so tightly. Release me from the pain of past hurts, of present anger and tension, of future fears. Sometimes it's too much for me Lord, too many demands and problems, too much sadness, suffering, and stress. Renew me spiritually and emotionally. Give me new strength, hope, and confidence. Prepare me to meet the constant struggles of daily life with a deeper faith and trust in You. Let your love set me free, for peace, for joy, for grace, for life, for others, forever.

Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless. St Teresa of Calcutta

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