



The Holy See

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

*Consistory Hall
Friday, 17 March 1995*

*Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Dear Friends in Christ,*

1. It is always a pleasure for me to meet the members of the *Pontifical Council for Social Communications* on the occasion of your Plenary Meeting I greet your President Emeritus, Cardinal Deskur, and I thank Archbishop Foley for his words of presentation. Your Council, as one of the first visible fruits of the Second Vatican Council, merits particular gratitude on my part. The Pontifical Council has rendered a great service to the ministry of successive Popes during the last three decades by making it possible for papal teaching and the pastoral initiatives of the Pope to reach a wide and international audience, Catholic and otherwise. But even more significantly, appreciation is due for the guidance and incentive which the Pontifical Council gives to individual Catholics and institutions involved in the vast and complex world of the communications media.

Indeed, since the Church exists to proclaim the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ, she cannot fail to pay close attention to the marvellous instruments of mass communication which human genius has produced and which, because they have an extraordinary bearing on the human spirit, can and should be highly effective means of spiritual and cultural advancement (cf. *Inter mirifica*, n. 1).

2. This year, a significant anniversary offers elements of reflection for your Plenary Meeting. I refer to the *centenary of cinematography*. As you are well aware, this centenary provided the theme for this year's World Communications Day: "Cinema: communicator of culture and of values". This

commemoration has special importance for you, not only because your Council has responsibility for the Vatican Film Library but also and especially because you have a specific role in fostering the Church's presence in the world of cinema.

Since the first public audience in Paris viewed the moving pictures prepared by the Lumière brothers in December 1895, the film industry has become a universal medium exercising a profound influence on the development of people's attitudes and choices, and possessing a *remarkable ability to influence public opinion and culture* across all social and political frontiers. The Church's overall judgment of this art form, as of all genuine art, is positive and hopeful. We have seen that masterpieces of the art of film making can be moving challenges to the human spirit, capable of dealing in depth with subjects of great meaning and importance from an ethical and spiritual point of view. Unfortunately though, some cinema productions merit criticism and disapproval, even severe criticism and disapproval. This is the case when films distort the truth, oppress genuine freedom, or show scenes of sex and violence offensive to human dignity. It is a fallacy for film-makers to do this in the name of free artistic expression.

Freedom is an indivisible human good; it *cannot be invoked to justify moral evil or absolve degrading behaviour*, particularly in view of the uncritical way in which most people accept the cinema's powerful and persuasive influence. In encouraging and recognizing films which strengthen and uplift the human spirit and in discouraging the production and viewing of films which depict and appear to sanction human depravity, the Church is not seeking to limit creativity but to liberate creative talent and challenge it to pursue the highest ideals of this art form.

3. *Genuine art is about truth, goodness and beauty.* Its purpose must be to serve the integral well-being and development of those to whom it is directed. I remember the words which the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council addressed to artists at its closing session: "This world in which we live needs beauty in order not to sink into despair. It is beauty, like truth, which brings joy to people's hearts and is that precious fruit which resists the wear and tear of time, which unites generations and makes them share things in admiration". While we must hope that the centenary of the cinema will somehow cause the film industry worldwide to reflect on its potential and assume its serious responsibilities.

The Church, which has always been a patron of the best in art and culture, has an obligation to foster the moral quality of what is perhaps the most immediately influential of all art forms. You, as members of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, as well as the members of the international Catholic communications organizations, have *the task and responsibility of encouraging and promoting the moral vision* which gives genuine content and inspiring expression to this art. In this way the cinema will be a more and more positive factor in the development of individuals and a stimulus for the conscience of society as a whole, as it has been in the case of many worthwhile productions during the first hundred years of its existence.

4. Your Plenary Meeting is also focusing on other important questions, in particular the role and responsibilities of dedicated lay men and women involved in press, radio, cinema and television, as well as in the swiftly evolving sector of electronic communications. A vital part of your efforts must be directed to *encouraging and guiding such Catholic professionals*, and to helping the Church to minister to them in an ever more effective way as they face the daily challenge of being true communicators of culture and of values.

5. In concluding, I note that this year also marks the twentieth year of the worldwide telecasts via satellite of papal ceremonies at Christmas and Easter, organized by the Pontifical Council for Social Communications and made possible through the generosity of the Knights of Columbus. In expressing my own gratitude, I pray that God will reward the efforts of all who have supported this important apostolate.

May Almighty God strengthen your resolve to serve the Gospel of life and love through your activities in the sphere of social communications. May your efforts bring forth abundant fruits of truth, goodness and solidarity in that particular area of the Church's evangelizing mission. I commend you all to the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, and of your Patron Saint Francis de Sales. As a token of my esteem and spiritual closeness, I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing.