



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II FOR THE 24th WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY

"The Christian Message in a Computer Culture"

[Sunday, 27 May 1990]

Brothers and Sisters,

Dear Friends,

In one of her Eucharistic Prayers, the Church addresses God in these words: "You formed man in your own likeness and set him over the whole world, to serve you, his creator, and to rule over all creatures" (*Eucharistic Prayer IV*).

For man and woman thus created and commissioned by God, the ordinary working day has great and wonderful significance. People's ideas, activities and undertakings - however commonplace they may be - are used by the Creator to renew the world, to lead it to salvation, to make it a more perfect instrument of divine glory.

Almost twenty-five years ago, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, reflecting on the Church in the modern world, declared that men and women, serving their families and the community in their ordinary occupations, were entitled to look upon their work as "a prolongation of the work of the Creator ... and as their personal contribution to the fulfilment in history of the divine plan" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 34).

As the Council Fathers looked to the future and tried to discern the context in which the Church would be called upon to carry out her mission, they could clearly see that the progress of technology was already "transforming the face of the earth" and even reaching out to conquer space (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 5). They recognized that developments in communications technology, in particular, were likely to set off chain reactions with unforeseen consequences.

Far from suggesting that the Church should stand aloof or try to isolate herself from the mainstream of these events, the Council Fathers saw the Church as being in the very midst of human progress, sharing the experiences of the rest of humanity, seeking to understand them and to interpret them in the light of faith. It was for God's faithful people to make creative use of the new discoveries and technologies for the benefit of humanity and the fulfilment of God's plan for the world.

This recognition of rapid change and this openness to new developments have proved timely in the years that followed, for the pace of change and development has continued to accelerate. Today, for example, one no longer thinks or speaks of social communications as mere instruments or technologies. Rather they are now seen as part of a still unfolding culture whose full implications are as yet imperfectly understood and whose potentialities remain for the moment only partly exploited.

Here we find the basis for our reflections on this Twenty-fourth World Communications Day. With each day that passes the vision of earlier years becomes ever more a reality. It was a vision which foresaw the possibility of real dialogue between widely-separated peoples, of a worldwide sharing of ideas and aspirations, of growth in mutual knowledge and understanding, of a strengthening of brotherhood across many hitherto insurmountable barriers (cf. *Communio et Progressio*, 181, 182).

With the advent of computer telecommunications and what are known as computer participation systems, the Church is offered further means for fulfilling her mission. Methods of facilitating communication and dialogue among her own members can strengthen the bonds of unity between them. Immediate access to information makes it possible for her to deepen her dialogue with the contemporary world. 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. She can hear more clearly the voice of public opinion, and enter into a continuous discussion with the world around her, thus involving herself more immediately in the common search for solutions to humanity's many pressing problems (cf. *Communio et Progressio*, 114 ff.).

It is clear that the Church must also avail herself of the new resources provided by human exploration in computer and satellite technology for her ever pressing task of evangelization. Her most vital and urgent message has to do with knowledge of Christ and the way of salvation which he offers. This is something she must put before the people of every age, inviting them to embrace the Gospel out of love, ever mindful that "truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, which wins over the mind with both gentleness and power" (*Dignitatis Humanae*, 1).

As the wisdom and insights of past years teach us: "God has spoken to humanity according to the culture proper to each age. Similarly the Church, which in the course of time has existed in varying circumstances, has utilized the resources of different cultures in her preaching to spread and

explain the message of Christ" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 58). "The first proclamation, catechesis or the further deepening of faith cannot do without the (means of social communication). ... The Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect. It is through them that she proclaims 'from the housetops' the message of which she is the depositary" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 45).

Surely we must be grateful for the new technology which enables us to store information in vast man-made artificial memories, thus providing wide and instant access to the knowledge which is our human heritage, to the Church's teaching and tradition, the words of Sacred Scripture, the counsels of the great masters of spirituality, the history and traditions of the local Churches, of Religious Orders and lay institutes, and to the ideas and experiences of initiators and innovators whose insights bear constant witness to the faithful presence in our midst of a loving Father who brings out of his treasure new things and old (cf. Mt 13:52).

Young people especially are readily adapting to the computer culture and its "language". This is surely a cause for satisfaction. Let us "trust the young" (*Communio et Progressio*, 70). They have had the advantage of growing up with the new developments, and it will be their duty to employ these new instruments for a wider and more intense dialogue among all the diverse races and classes who share this "shrinking globe". It falls to them to search out ways in which the new systems of data conservation and exchange can be used to assist in promoting greater universal justice, greater respect for human rights, a healthy development for all individuals and peoples, and the freedoms essential for a fully human life.

Whether we are young or old, let us rise to the challenge of new discoveries and technologies by bringing to them a moral vision rooted in our religious faith, in our respect for the human person, and our commitment to transform the world in accordance with God's plan. On this World Communications Day, let us pray for wisdom in using the potential of the "computer age" to serve man's human and transcendent calling, and thus to give glory to the Father from whom all good things come.

From the Vatican, 24 January 1990, the Feast of Saint Francis de Sales.

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