



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II FOR THE 34th WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY

“Proclaiming Christ in the Media at the Dawn of the New Millennium”

[Sunday, 4 June 2000]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The theme of the thirty-fourth World Communications Day, *Proclaiming Christ in the Media at the Dawn of the New Millennium*, is an invitation to look ahead to the challenges we face, and also back to the dawn of Christianity itself, for the light and courage we need. The substance of the message which we proclaim is always Jesus himself: "the whole of human history in fact stands in reference to him: our own time and the future of the world are illumined by his presence"

(*Incarnationis Mysterium*, 1).

The early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles contain a moving account of the proclamation of Christ by his first followers - a proclamation at once spontaneous, faith-filled, and persuasive, and carried out through the power of the Holy Spirit.

First and most important, the disciples proclaim Christ in response to the mandate he had given them. Before ascending into heaven he tells the Apostles: "You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). And even though these are "uneducated, common men" (Acts 4:13), they respond quickly and generously.

Having spent time in prayer with Mary and other followers of the Lord, and acting at the Spirit's prompting, the Apostles begin the work of proclamation at Pentecost (cf. Acts 2). As we read about those marvellous events, we are reminded that the history of communication is a kind of journey, from the pride-driven project of Babel and the collapse into confusion and mutual incomprehension to which it gave rise (cf. Gen 11:1-9), to Pentecost and the gift of tongues: a

restoration of communication, centred on Jesus, through the action of the Holy Spirit. Proclaiming Christ therefore leads to a meeting between people in faith and charity at the deepest level of their humanity; the Risen Lord himself becomes a medium of genuine communication among his brothers and sisters in the Spirit.

Pentecost is only the beginning. Even when threatened with reprisals, the Apostles are not deterred from proclaiming the Lord: "We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard," Peter and John tell the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:20). Indeed, trials themselves become instrumental to the mission. When a violent persecution breaks out in Jerusalem after Stephen's martyrdom, forcing Christ's followers to flee, "those who were scattered went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).

The living heart of the message which the Apostles preach is Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection - life triumphant over sin and death. Peter tells the centurion Cornelius and his household: "They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and made him manifest ... And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:39-43).

It goes without saying that circumstances have changed enormously in two millennia. Yet the same need to proclaim Christ still exists. Our duty to bear witness to the death and resurrection of Jesus and to his saving presence in our lives is as real and pressing as was the duty of the first disciples. We must tell the good news to all who are willing to listen.

Direct, personal proclamation - one person sharing faith in the Risen Lord with another - is essential; so are other traditional forms of spreading the word of God. But, alongside these, proclamation today must take place also in and through the media. "The Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means" (Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 45).

The impact of the media in today's world can hardly be exaggerated. The advent of the information society is a real cultural revolution, making the media "the first Areopagus of the modern age" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 37), where facts and ideas and values are constantly being exchanged. Through the media, people come into contact with other people and events, and form their opinions about the world they live in - indeed, form their understanding of the meaning of life. For many, the experience of living is to a great extent an experience of the media (cf. Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Aetatis Novae*, 2). The proclamation of Christ must be part of this experience.

Naturally, in proclaiming the Lord, the Church must make energetic and skilful use of her own means of communication - books, newspapers and periodicals, radio, television, and other means.

And Catholic communicators must be bold and creative in developing new media and methods of proclamation. But, as much as possible, the Church also must use the opportunities that are to be found in the secular media.

Already the media contribute to spiritual enrichment in many ways - for example, the many special programmes being carried to worldwide audiences through satellite telecasts during the year of the Great Jubilee. In other cases, however, they display the indifference, even hostility, to Christ and his message that exist in certain sectors of secular culture. Often though, there is a need for a kind of "examination of conscience" on the part of the media, leading to a more critical awareness of a bias or a lack of respect for people's religious and moral convictions.

Media presentations which call attention to authentic human needs, especially those of the weak, the vulnerable and the marginalized, can be an implicit proclamation of the Lord. But besides implicit proclamation, Christian communicators should also seek out ways to speak explicitly of Jesus crucified and risen, of his triumph over sin and death, in a manner suited to the medium used and to the capacities of audiences.

To do this well demands professional training and skill. But it also requires something more. In order to witness to Christ it is necessary to encounter him oneself and foster a personal relationship with him through prayer, the Eucharist and sacramental reconciliation, reading and reflection on God's word, the study of Christian doctrine, and service to others. And always, if it is authentic, this will be the Spirit's work much more than our own.

To proclaim Christ is not only a duty but a privilege. "The journey of believers towards the third millennium is in no way weighed down by the weariness which the burden of two thousand years of history could bring with it. Rather, Christians feel invigorated, in the knowledge that they bring to the world the true light, Christ the Lord. Proclaiming Jesus of Nazareth, true God and perfect Man, the Church opens to all people the prospect of being 'divinized' and thus of becoming more human" (*Incarnationis Mysterium*, 2).

The Great Jubilee of the 2000th anniversary of Jesus' birth at Bethlehem must be an opportunity and a challenge for the Lord's disciples to bear witness in and through the media to the extraordinary, consoling Good News of our salvation. In this "year of favour", may the media give voice to Jesus himself, clearly and joyously, with faith and hope and love. To proclaim Christ in the media at the dawn of the new millennium is not only a necessary part of the Church's evangelizing mission; it is also a vital, inspiring and hope-filled enrichment of the media's message. May God abundantly bless all those who honour and proclaim his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, in the vast world of the means of social communication.

From the Vatican, 24 January 2000.

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