



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II FOR THE 35th WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY

"Preach from the housetops": The Gospel in the Age of Global Communication

[Sunday, 27 May 2001]

1. The theme which I have chosen for World Communications Day 2001 echoes the words of Jesus himself. It could not be otherwise, for it is Christ alone whom we preach. We remember his words to his first disciples: "What I tell you in the dark, utter in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim upon the housetops" (Mt 10:27). In the secret of our heart, we have listened to the truth of Jesus; now we must proclaim that truth from the housetops.

In today's world, housetops are almost always marked by a forest of transmitters and antennae sending and receiving messages of every kind to and from the four corners of the earth. It is vitally important to ensure that among these many messages the word of God is heard. To proclaim the faith from the housetops today means to speak Jesus' word in and through the dynamic world of communications.

2. In all cultures and at all times - certainly in the midst of today's global transformations - people ask the same basic questions about the meaning of life: Who am I? Where have I come from and where am I going? Why is there evil? What is there after this life? (cf. *Fides et Ratio*, 1). And in every age the Church offers the one ultimately satisfying answer to the deepest questions of the human heart - Jesus Christ himself, "who fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his high calling" (*Gaudium et spes*, 22). Therefore, the voice of Christians can never fall silent, for the Lord has entrusted to us the word of salvation for which every human heart longs. The Gospel offers the pearl of great price for which all are searching (cf. Mt 13:45-46).

It follows that the Church cannot fail to be ever more deeply involved in the burgeoning world of communications. The global communications network is extending and growing more complex by the day, and the media are having an increasingly visible effect on culture and its transmission. Where once the media reported events, now events are often shaped to meet the requirements of the media. Thus, the relationship between reality and the media has grown more intricate, and this

is a deeply ambivalent phenomenon. On the one hand, it can blur the distinction between truth and illusion; but on the other, it can open up unprecedented opportunities for making the truth more widely accessible to many more people. The task of the Church is to ensure that it is the latter which actually happens.

3. The world of the media can sometimes seem indifferent and even hostile to Christian faith and morality. This is partly because media culture is so deeply imbued with a typically postmodern sense that the only absolute truth is that there are no absolute truths or that, if there were, they would be inaccessible to human reason and therefore irrelevant. In such a view, what matters is not the truth but "the story"; if something is newsworthy or entertaining, the temptation to set aside considerations of truth becomes almost irresistible. As a result, the world of the media can sometimes seem no more friendly an environment for evangelization than the pagan world of the Apostles' day. But just as the early witnesses to the Good News did not retreat when faced with opposition, neither should Christ's followers do so today. The cry of Saint Paul echoes among us still: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Cor 9:16).

Yet, as much as the world of the media may at times seem at odds with the Christian message, it also offers unique opportunities for proclaiming the saving truth of Christ to the whole human family. Consider, for instance, satellite telecasts of religious ceremonies which often reach a global audience, or the positive capacities of the Internet to carry religious information and teaching beyond all barriers and frontiers. Such a wide audience would have been beyond the wildest imaginings of those who preached the Gospel before us. What is therefore needed in our time is an active and imaginative engagement of the media by the Church. Catholics should not be afraid to throw open the doors of social communications to Christ, so that his Good News may be heard from the housetops of the world!

4. It is vital too that at the beginning of this new millennium we keep in mind the mission *ad gentes* which Christ has entrusted to the Church. An estimated two thirds of the world's six billion people do not in any real sense know Jesus Christ; and many of them live in countries with ancient Christian roots, where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or no longer consider themselves members of the Church and live lives far removed from the Lord and his Gospel (cf. *Redemptoris missio*, 33). Certainly, an effective response to this situation involves much more than the media; but in striving to meet the challenge Christians cannot possibly ignore the world of social communications. Indeed, media of every kind can play an essential role in direct evangelization and in bringing to people the truths and values which support and enhance human dignity. The Church's presence in the media is in fact an important aspect of the inculturation of the Gospel demanded by the new evangelization to which the Holy Spirit is summoning the Church throughout the world.

As the whole Church seeks to heed the Spirit's call, Christian communicators have "a prophetic task, a vocation: to speak out against the false gods and idols of the day - materialism, hedonism,

consumerism, narrow nationalism..." (*Ethics in Communications*, 31). Above all, they have the duty and privilege to declare the truth - the glorious truth about human life and human destiny revealed in the Word made flesh. May Catholics involved in the world of social communications preach the truth of Jesus ever more boldly and joyfully from the housetops, so that all men and women may hear about the love which is the heart of God's self-communication in Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever (cf Heb 13:8).

From the Vatican, 24 January 2001, the memorial of Saint Francis de Sales.

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