

**MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XVI
FOR THE 40th WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY**

***"The Media: A Network for Communication,
Communion and Cooperation"***

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. In the wake of the fortieth-anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, I am happy to recall its Decree on the Means of Social Communication, *Inter Mirifica*, which in particular recognized the power of the media to influence the whole of human society. The need to harness that power for the benefit of all mankind has prompted me, in this my first message for World Communications Day, to reflect briefly on the idea of the media as a network facilitating communication, communion, and cooperation.

Saint Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, vividly depicts our human vocation to be "sharers in the divine nature" (*Dei Verbum*, 2): through Christ we have access in one Spirit to the Father; so we are no longer strangers and aliens but citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, growing into a holy temple, a dwelling place for God (cf. *Eph* 2:18-22). This sublime portrayal of a life of communion engages all aspects of our lives as Christians. The call to be true to the self-communication of God in Christ is in fact a call to recognize his dynamic force within us, which then seeks to spread outwards to others, so that his love can truly become the prevalent measure of the world (cf. *Homily for World Youth Day*, Cologne, 21 August 2005).

2. Technological advances in the media have in certain respects conquered time and space, making communication between people, even when separated by vast distances, both instantaneous and direct. This development presents an enormous potential for service of the common good and "constitutes a patrimony to safeguard and promote" (*Rapid Development*, 10). Yet, as we all know, our world is far from perfect. Daily we are reminded that immediacy of communication does not necessarily translate into the building of cooperation and communion in society.

To inform the consciences of individuals and help shape their thinking is never a neutral task. Authentic communication demands principled courage and resolve. It requires a determination of those working in the media not to wilt under the weight of so much information nor even to be content with partial or provisional truths. Instead it necessitates both seeking and transmitting what is the ultimate foundation and meaning of

human, personal and social existence (cf. *Fides et Ratio*, 5). In this way the media can contribute constructively to the propagation of all that is good and true.

3. The call for today's media to be responsible - to be the protagonist of truth and promoter of the peace that ensues - carries with it a number of challenges. While the various instruments of social communication facilitate the exchange of information, ideas, and mutual understanding among groups, they are also tainted by ambiguity. Alongside the provision of a "great round table" for dialogue, certain tendencies within the media engender a kind of monoculture that dims creative genius, deflates the subtlety of complex thought and undervalues the specificity of cultural practices and the particularity of religious belief. These are distortions that occur when the media industry becomes self-serving or solely profit-driven, losing the sense of accountability to the common good.

Accurate reporting of events, full explanation of matters of public concern, and fair representation of diverse points of view must, then, always be fostered. The need to uphold and support marriage and family life is of particular importance, precisely because it pertains to the foundation of every culture and society (cf. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11). In cooperation with parents, the social communications and entertainment industries can assist in the difficult but sublimely satisfying vocation of bringing up children, through presenting edifying models of human life and love (cf. *Inter Mirifica*, 11). How disheartening and destructive it is to us all when the opposite occurs. Do not our hearts cry out, most especially, when our young people are subjected to debased or false expressions of love which ridicule the God-given dignity of every human person and undermine family interests?

4. To encourage both a constructive presence and a positive perception of the media in society, I wish to reiterate the importance of three steps, identified by my venerable predecessor Pope John Paul II, necessary for their service of the common good: formation, participation, and dialogue (cf. *Rapid Development*, 11).

Formation in the responsible and critical use of the media helps people to use them intelligently and appropriately. The profound impact upon the mind of new vocabulary and of images, which the electronic media in particular so easily introduce into society, cannot be overestimated. Precisely because contemporary media shape popular culture, they themselves must overcome any temptation to manipulate, especially the young, and instead pursue the desire to form and serve. In this way they protect rather than erode the fabric of a civil society worthy of the human person.

Participation in the mass media arises from their nature as a good destined for all people. As a public service, social communication requires a spirit of cooperation and co-responsibility with vigorous accountability of the use of public resources and the performance of roles of public trust (cf. *Ethics in Communications*, 20), including recourse to regulatory standards and other measures or structures designed to effect this goal.

Finally, the promotion of dialogue through the exchange of learning, the expression of solidarity and the espousal of peace presents a great opportunity for the mass media which must be recognized and exercised. In this way they become influential and appreciated resources for building the civilization of love for which all peoples yearn.

I am confident that serious efforts to promote these three steps will assist the media to develop soundly as a network of communication, communion and cooperation, helping men, women and children, to become more aware of the dignity of the human person, more responsible, and more open to others especially the neediest and the weakest members of society (cf. *Redemptor Hominis*, 15; *Ethics in Communications*, 4).

In conclusion, I return to the encouraging words of Saint Paul: Christ is our peace. In him we are one (cf. *Eph* 2:14). Let us together break down the dividing walls of hostility and build up the communion of love according to the designs of the Creator made known through his Son!

From the Vatican, 24 January 2006, the Feast of Saint Francis de Sales.

BENEDICTUS XVI