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Communication | N F O

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Vol. XXII, Nos. 2&3
February/March 2007

41st World Communication Day
Theme> **Children and the Media:**
A Challenge for Education
Sunday May 20, 2006

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. The theme of the Forty-first World Communications Day, "Children and the Media: A Challenge for Education", invites us to reflect on two related topics of immense importance. The formation of children is one. The other, perhaps less obvious but no less important, is the formation of the media.

The complex challenges facing education today are often linked to the pervasive influence of the media in our world. As an aspect of the phenomenon of globalization, and facilitated by the rapid development of technology, the media profoundly shape the cultural environment (cf. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter The Rapid Development, 3). Indeed, some claim that the formative influence of the media rivals that of the school, the Church, and maybe even the home. "Reality, for many, is what the media recognize as real" (Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Aetatis Novae, 4).
2. The relationship of children, media, and education can be considered from two perspectives: the formation of children by the media; and the formation of children to respond appropriately to the media. A kind of reciprocity emerges which points to the responsibilities of the media as an industry and to the need for active and critical participation of readers, viewers and listeners. Within this framework, training in the proper use of the media is essential for the cultural, moral and spiritual development of children.

How is this common good to be protected and promoted? Educating children to be discriminating in their use of the media is a responsibility of parents, Church, and school. The role of parents is of primary importance. They have a right and duty to ensure the prudent use of the media by training the conscience of their children to express sound and objective judgments which will then guide them in choosing or rejecting programmes available (cf. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio, 76). In doing so, parents should have the encouragement and assistance of schools and parishes in ensuring that this difficult, though satisfying, aspect of parenting is supported by the wider community.

Media education should be positive. Children exposed to what is aesthetically and morally excellent are helped to develop appreciation, prudence and the skills of discernment. Here it is important to recognize the fundamental value of parents' example and the benefits of introducing young people to children's classics in literature, to the fine arts and to uplifting music. While popular literature will always have its place in culture, the temptation to sensationalize should not be passively accepted in places of learning. Beauty, a kind of mirror of the divine, inspires and vivifies young hearts and minds, while ugliness and coarseness have a depressing impact on attitudes and behaviour.

Like education in general, media education requires formation in the exercise of freedom. This is a demanding task. So often freedom is presented as a relentless search for pleasure or new experiences. Yet this is a condemnation not a liberation! True freedom could never condemn the individual – especially a child – to an insatiable quest for novelty. In the light of truth, authentic freedom is experienced as a definitive response to God's 'yes' to humanity, calling us to choose, not indiscriminately but deliberately, all that is good, true and beautiful. Parents, then, as the guardians of that freedom, while

gradually giving their children greater freedom, introduce them to the profound joy of life (cf. Address to the Fifth World Meeting of Families, Valencia, 8 July 2006).

3. This heartfelt wish of parents and teachers to educate children in the ways of beauty, truth and goodness can be supported by the media industry only to the extent that it promotes fundamental human dignity, the true value of marriage and family life, and the positive achievements and goals of humanity. Thus, the need for the media to be committed to effective formation and ethical standards is viewed with particular interest and even urgency not only by parents and teachers but by all who have a sense of civic responsibility.

While affirming the belief that many people involved in social communications want to do what is right (cf. Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Ethics in Communications, 4), we must also recognize that those who work in this field confront "special psychological pressures and ethical dilemmas" (Aetatis Novae, 19) which at times see commercial competitiveness compelling communicators to lower standards. Any trend to produce programmes and products - including animated films and video games - which in the name of entertainment exalt violence and portray anti-social behaviour or the trivialization of human sexuality is a perversion, all the more repulsive when these programmes are directed at children and adolescents. How could one explain this 'entertainment' to the countless innocent young people who actually suffer violence, exploitation and abuse? In this regard, all would do well to reflect on the contrast between Christ who "put his arms around [the children] laid his hands on them and gave them his blessing" (Mk 10:16) and the one who "leads astray … these little ones" for whom "it would be better … if a millstone were hung round his neck" (Lk 17:2). Again I appeal to the leaders of the media industry to educate and encourage producers to safeguard the common good, to uphold the truth, to protect individual human dignity and promote respect for the needs of the family.

4. The Church herself, in the light of the message of salvation entrusted to her, is also a teacher of humanity and welcomes the opportunity to offer assistance to parents, educators, communicators, and young people. Her own parish and school programmes should be in the forefront of media education today. Above all, the Church desires to share a vision of human dignity that is central to all worthy human communication. "Seeing with the eyes of Christ, I can give to others much more than their outward necessities; I can give them the look of love which they crave" (Deus Caritas Est, 18).

From the Vatican, 24 January 2007, the Feast of Saint Francis de Sales.

BISCOM VI ON 'CHURCH AND NEW MEDIA' IN MAY 2007

"Converging Communications for Ministry in Asia: Modern Communication Technologies for the Church" is the theme of the sixth "Bishops' Institute for Social Communication" (BISCOM VI) to be held from May 28 to June 2, 2007 at Assumption University, Bang Na campus in Bangkok.

The conference will discuss uses and possiblities of Internet and cyberspace for Church ministry. "Religion Online," for example, the virtual presence of religions, will be explained along with Online Religion, or religious practices in cyberspace.

Instant Messaging (chats), Web-blogs, SMS and other online channels for ministry will be discussed as well as the moral implications (ethics) of Internet. Hands-on training sessions will also be held daily during the conference for interested participants.

BISCOM VI is open to bishops and bishops' conference communication personnel. It is a follow-up of BISCOM II (Bangkok, 1999) and BISCOM II.1 (Bangkok, 2001) which dealt with similar themes. To download the program and to register, log on to <www.fabc.org>

"Bishops' Institutes" in FABC parlance are seminar-workshops for bishops and bishops' conference personnel.

"Converging communication" refers to communication technologies coming together into a single device like the computer or hand-held instruments.

COMMENTARY / REFLECTION

"Like education in general, media education requires formation in the exercise of freedom. This is a demanding task. ... True freedom could never condemn the individual - especially a child - to an insatiable quest for novelty. In the light of truth, authentic freedom is experienced as a definitive response to God's 'yes' to humanity, calling us to choose, not indiscriminately but deliberately, all that is good, true and beautiful. Parents, then, as the guardians of that freedom, while gradually giving their children greater freedom, introduce them to the profound joy of life"

In his message Pope Benedict XVI focuses on education in general and how proper formation can help children learn to be truly free. He looks at how a knowledge of how to exercise their own freedom in the social context in which they find themselves can help them develop a profound joy of life. This ideal presents a great challenge, but so too does understanding the powerful influence of media messages. For this reason, the Holy Father appeals to Church members, families and schools to provide an effective education in the use of the media.

It is important to note that Pope Benedict XVI calls on us to enter into the world of the media with courage and to choose that which is best for us and the new generations. It is not a call to escape from the media reality in which we find ourselves.

The Holy Father reminds us that children need to be accompanied as much as possible as they interact with the media and where the risk of sometimes confusing reality with fiction exists. Ideally, parents, teachers and parish communities should become knowledgeable of the languages and techniques used by the media in order to be better selective of what they offer, to assist children in discernment and in making better choices. General criteria based on principles such as beauty, goodness and truth can offer good guidelines in selecting programming, content or even videogames.

A primary goal is also to avoid instances where children can be directed towards themes or situations which impoverish or deceive them under the guise of freedom, or where a relentless desire for novelty is created which, in the long run, will never be satisfied or bring about real happiness. The ideal is that children can learn how to choose what is best for themselves, helping them to grow in goodness and joy: *"Beauty, a kind of mirror of the divine, inspires and vivifies young hearts and minds, while ugliness and coarseness have a depressing impact on attitudes and behaviour."* Beauty, a *"mirror of the divine"* can help direct and inspire a responsible use of freedom.

The Message also consists of an appeal to leaders in the media industry to respect human dignity. With awareness of the often intense commercial pressures facing those who work in this field, the Message nevertheless encourages producers: *"to safeguard the common good, to uphold the truth, to protect individual human dignity and promote respect for the needs of the family."*

READINGS

FIRST READING

Acts 1:1-11: "But you will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses."
Ephesians 1:7-23: "May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call."
Wisdom 9:1-9: "Indeed, though one be perfect among the sons of men, if Wisdom, who comes from you, be not with him, he shall be held in no esteem."

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 46: "God is our refuge and our strength, an ever-present help in distress."
Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I lack."
Psalm 75: "We thank you, God, we give thanks; we call upon your name."

SECOND READING

Hebrews 9:24-28: "But now once for all he has appeared at the end of the ages to take away sin by his sacrifice."
Hebrews 10:19-23: "Let us approach with a sincere heart and in absolute trust, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water."
2 Corinthians 7:1-4: Let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God."

GOSPEL

Luke 24:46-53: "And behold I am sending the promise of my Father upon you."
Luke 17:1-4: "If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him."
Mark 10:13-16: "Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

CELEBRANT:
Merciful God, we ask that we may be faithful to your son, Jesus Christ, light of the world and prince of peace, and that you may guide us in our efforts to protect children and the family, we pray: *Lord, teach us to be your witnesses* .

READER:
For the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, that he may be strengthened by the Lord in his work of communicating the love of God manifested in Christ, especially in the service of the poor and most vulnerable, we pray... R: *Lord, teach us to be your witnesses.*

For bishops, priests and deacons, that their pastoral ministry may reflect the living message of Christ who loves the simplicity and humility of children, we pray... R: *Lord, teach us to be your witnesses.*

For all of our community, that we may strive to serve others and find in the communications media an effective tool for evangelization, witness and spiritual growth, we pray... R: *Lord, teach us to be your witnesses.*

For civil and government leaders, that they may work to ensure a responsible use of the communications media which show respect for children, we pray... R: *Lord, teach us to be your witnesses.*

For parents and teachers, whether at home or in school, that they may know how to transmit and instill in children a profound respect for life, we pray... R: *Lord, teach us to be your witnesses.*

For children, especially those suffering from abuse or neglect, that they may meet people who show them warmth, respect and solidarity, we pray... R: *Lord, teach us to be your witnesses.*

For leaders in the communications media, that the Holy Spirit may enlighten them with wisdom and the desire to respect human dignity, we pray... R: *Lord, teach us to be your witnesses.*

CELEBRANT:
Father of all goodness, receive the prayers which we offer to you, so that through the intercession of Mary, Mother of God, we may be able to witness to the Lord, using all the instruments you have given us through creation. Through Jesus Christ, Our Lord, Amen.