

**Document On "Ethics In Social Communications"**  
*Without Ethics, Media Threatens Liberty And Democracy*

- Today the Vatican published an document entitled, "Ethics in Social Communications." It is an easy-to-read guide that articulates the primary moral principles that must be the foundation of the new communications technology, which inexorably affects all aspects of social existence, from the activity of stock markets to people's home lives.

During a press conference, Archbishop John P. Foley, president of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, the organization responsible for the text, explained that this was the Holy See's response to requests from professionals around the world, many of whom are not Catholics. The document is a sequel to "Ethics in Advertising," published by the Council in 1997, which has been consulted by a number of advertising experts.

**Fundamental Principles**

Archbishop Foley said that "Ethics in Social Communication" is based on the fundamental principle that "the human person and the human community are the end and measure of the use of the media of social communication; communication should be by persons to persons for the integral development of persons."

The text is clear: "The good of persons cannot be realized apart from the common good of the communities to which they belong." Because of this, "decisions about media content and policy should not be left only to the market and to economic factors and profits since these cannot be counted on to safeguard either the public interest as a whole or, especially, the legitimate interests of minorities."

The above mentioned minorities "are not just racial or ethnic, but also include the poor, the sick, the handicapped, the elderly, and the young. Therefore, although television frequencies can be allocated to private companies, which have a legitimate right to earnings on their investments, they are considered as a public good, and decisions relating to programming cannot be limited to typical demographic considerations, which only keep in mind the most active and receptive social groups from the commercial point of view."

Archbishop Foley said that politicians "have a tendency to favor only the interests of media giants, without considering the public good. In Europe this tendency is influencing the State television campaigns, which isolate and weaken developing countries even more and results in their having less of a voice."

The Archbishop concluded by summarizing the formula used in the document itself. The essential element of ethics in the media is the serving of "the human

person, building up a human community grounded in solidarity and justice and love and speaking the truth about human life and its final fulfillment in God."

### **Document for Dialogue**

Bishop Pierfranco Pastore, secretary of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, also attended the press conference. He said that in writing the document, there was an attempt to avoid two risks: "on one hand, to be closed in on ourselves, making impossible or at least more difficult our meeting with our audience (the world of communication); on the other, the risk of disguising ourselves, of watering down the 'message' we have the duty to transmit, which is the very reason why this request was made of us."

The Italian Bishop said that the issue of ethics in the media has decisive repercussions. "The current possibilities for manipulation, given the capacity and sophistication of the instruments, coupled with an unscrupulous and essentially 'immoral' use of the media can not only condition but also destroy individual liberty and democracy in general. It is necessary to stress that ethics is at the heart of information."

Bishop Pastore ended by recalling Pope Paul VI's words: "Experience teaches that the Church, expert in humanity, has much to give the world today: it must not lack the courage to do so."