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# *On the Apostolate of A Good Press*



FIVE ADDRESSES

given by

HIS HOLINESS, POPE JOHN XXIII

NATIONAL CATHOLIC WELFARE CONFERENCE

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## THE HOLY FATHER SPEAKS TO NEWSMEN

*Address given by His Holiness, Pope John XXIII, on December 4, 1960 to the Second National Convention of the Catholic Union of the Italian Press at Rome.*

We welcome you with particular affection, beloved sons, Catholic journalists. Yours is a beautiful name, lofty and meaningful.

Today's meeting recalls to Us other meetings, of representatives of the press, and it allows Us to reaffirm the esteem We have for those who dedicate themselves honestly to the difficult and serious profession of journalism. We have a natural and understandable preference for you who exercise this profession in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and of the living and perennial teaching of the Church.

We welcomed with paternal encouragement your second national assembly. And We are pleased to avail Ourselves of the occasion to return to a subject We have so much at heart.

Unfortunately, the shortcomings and dangers already deplored in the field of the press continue in their gravity. And Our anxiety is such that We consider Ourselves dispensed today from every other preamble, and from the repetition of impressive statistical pictures, known to you however, so as to proceed to outline for you that which We consider more necessary and urgent; not only for you, who do honor to your Catholicism, but for those people who work together with you in the name of honesty and truth and who defend those ideals that are common to men of good will.

It would be futile to allow ourselves to give way to regrets and recriminations. We must build, beloved sons, we must move forward, laying the foundations of a new era, a healthier, more equitable and more generous era, in the ardent desire for success that cannot be long delayed. We must sow, even though a profound sorrow may sometimes oppress our heart, certain of the promise of a happy harvest: "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy."<sup>1</sup>

We turn, therefore, to positive considerations, which We entrust to your experience and competence and good will.

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1. *Psalm* 125, 5.

These are: preparation, brotherly cooperation and coordination, and the Christian sensitivity of Catholic journalists.

1) Your professional preparation, beloved sons, makes you think of the vastness and importance of the mission you have chosen. You know well that one does not improvise for any task, and if long and hard years of specific preparation, theoretical and practical, are needed for every profession entailing social responsibility, this must apply also to militant journalists. A journalist is not improvised. To achieve that combination of gifts that makes his service easy and fruitful, an apprenticeship is necessary. Just think! He needs the delicacy of the doctor, the versatility of the literary scholar, the intuition of the jurist and the sense of responsibility of the educator.

Such breadth of interests and of horizons calls therefore for serious preparation. It will not be sufficient therefore only to know how to inform and to be informed. One must know the means and the techniques of information and, at the same time, not waste time in listening to and reading useless things, so that one's sensitivity may become more acute, and so that one may acquire the art of knowing how to select, sort and clothe the news.

Such preparation requires considerable material means, and economic compensation is therefore a duty. It is necessary for the employees of individual newspapers to receive a fair salary, despite the poverty of financial means usual in the Catholic press, deprived as it is of the benefits of exceptional financing to which the press of political parties and the so-called independent press have access.

The invocation and directive of Our immortal predecessor Leo XIII is still valid: "All those people who really and sincerely wish that sacred and civil things be defended effectively by able writers and that they flourish, must seek with their own generosity to favor in them the fruits of letters and talent. And the greater one's wealth, all the more must one support them with one's faculties and riches."<sup>2</sup>

One must give, therefore, and support the good cause. But even when the ideal and most satisfactory condition is achieved in this respect, one must always guard against pure professionalism. The man who, in fact, sees things solely from an economic and technical point of view and from that of perfection

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2. Encyclical *Etsi Nos*, February 15, 1882, *Acta Leone*, 3, 12.

of work, even though he is honest, will never achieve his aim unless he is supported and governed by the spirit of prayer, of charity and by an impulse of the apostolate. This embellishes your individual actions and makes them meritorious before God, particularly those that form the daily pattern of your activity.

You can see, therefore, that the first thing that We have at heart is your preparation, considered in its full light, in which are fused harmoniously natural gifts, technical requirements and the spiritual vocation to do good, to please God, according to the teaching of the Apostle: "May you walk worthily of God and please Him in all things, bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God."<sup>3</sup>

2) Brotherly cooperation and coordination. The second point accents the great duty of charity, which cannot be disregarded.

At the close of the memorable day of October 28, 1958, among the comments of the press on the election of the new Pope, you were the first to put the accent upon the "*diligite alterutrum*" (love one another) that rushed to Our lips when We accepted the burden imposed upon Us by God's will. We repeat, you placed the accent upon that "love one another" that lies close to Our heart like a sacred trust, first and above all other praiseworthy undertakings or measures that We have in mind.

Charity! "*Praeceptum Domini est*" (It is an injunction of the Lord), continued the Apostle of love, John the Evangelist. This charity invites you tenderly to remain united among yourselves, in faith as in action, in convictions and ideals, in your labors and in your militant endeavors.

Be united! And help faithful and convinced Catholics to remain united among themselves, to have faith in the social doctrine of the Church and in her legislation, filtered through the experience of many centuries, to know it and to examine it thoroughly. Help them to be ever more permeated by the Christian manner of thinking, of estimating or deciding, that they be above the temptations of isolation, resentment or self-interest, and that they do not allow themselves to be deceived by the appearances of an ill-understood liberty, which becomes intolerant of every reminder and of every discipline.

Understand Us well! The respect we owe to those who have not achieved complete Christian and Catholic maturity, those

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3. *Col.* 1, 10.

who are on the threshold of the temple, does not authorize dangerous concessions, compromises or renunciations, which harm the sacred patrimony of truth and justice that is the Gospel.

The greatest danger to which some of Our children are exposed is this: impatience with a common discipline, which becomes, however, tolerance and indifference towards the errors and dangerous positions taken by the various sectors of public life, in politics as well as in recreation, in literature as well as in religious observances.

Know also how to put yourselves on guard against that worldly spirit of which the particular current of modern thought and custom is the instrument. It tries by every means to remove society from the influence of the Gospel of Christ and the teachings of the Church, from the eternal values of divine truth, of love, of purity and of the apostolate from which Christian civilization blossomed.

These movements claim to be the defenders of an undefined liberty, but they are ready to deny it to the Church when the latter must protect its treasure of revealed truth or the patrimony of moral health that has been committed to it. They proclaim the separation and independence of the Church from civil power, but they work constantly toward restricting every action of the Church, covering it with the shadow of suspicion and malevolence. Their work could be compared to that described aptly by Manzoni, speaking of the "iniquitous who are strong, who can insult and claim to be offended, who sneer and call others to account, who terrify and complain, who are brazen and irreproachable."<sup>4</sup>

In the presence of such attitudes, union is more than ever necessary to defend and help defend truth, justice, honesty, even before religion and the Gospel.

Oh, beloved sons, your mission is great also because of this aspect, and it is worthy of every encouragement and comfort. Be united, therefore. It is the Pope who asks it of you in the name of Him who prayed for the union of all His faithful: that all may be one, also and above all because of the goal, which We have described to you: "That all may be one, even as thou, Father, in me and I in thee; that they also may be one in us."<sup>5</sup>

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4. *"I Promessi Sposi,"* Chap. VII.

5. *John* 17, 21.

3) Finally, a profound Christian sensitivity is necessary, permeating each of your actions, and diffusing with grace and distinction that "good fragrance of Christ,"<sup>6</sup> that gives a just tone to everything. Have a Christian sensitivity in everything and with everyone, so that the testimony of sincerity united with respect, of clarity of ideas combined with maturity of thought and expression may reach everyone.

We welcome the occasion of this intimate meeting to tell you that in examining periodicals and newspapers, We often find phrases that are tricky, bombastic, disproportionate, bitter, aggressive or uselessly polemical. This is an indication of a custom that has penetrated everywhere, sometimes even in publicity announcements, in reports of sports events and country folklore manifestations.

The Catholic journalist ought to guard against this way of thinking and writing, which corrupts the true meaning of that courtesy, education and Christian method that seeks to convince with persuasive gentility and attract by arguments and not suggestions.

The sensitivity of which We are speaking is revealed by the use or nonuse of a given news item, and by the form given to a salacious and troubling incident. By so doing, the writer adheres to the dictates of an upright conscience and not to more or less questionable objectives.

This sensitivity is also shown by avoidance of praise, particularly toward living persons; by not attributing all merit to one side, to one organization, but rather by selecting that which edifies, no matter where, by encouragement and establishment of profitable contacts. This sensitivity also teaches us to give consideration to the history of those who have gone before, not to forget the teachings of the past, to make use of every good testimony of the human spirit in the course of people's lives.

Christian sensibility, as you have understood, seeks out and emphasizes the universal expressions of the true, the good and the beautiful, which find voice and color in Nature, in music and in the monuments of literature and art. We repeat, beloved sons, the words we said with fatherly encouragement to your colleagues of "*L'Avvenire d'Italia*" (Bologna Catholic daily) on October 18 of last year:

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6. Cf. 2 Cor., 2, 15.

“Educate your readers in the appreciation of what is true, good, beautiful; know then how to draw the material of your services from the inexhaustible fountains of truth, beauty and goodness that spring from the illustration of the various epochs of history, of the world of art and poetry, from the conquests of science, from the marvelous life of the universe, and from the travels of explorers and missionaries.”<sup>7</sup>

What a font of inexhaustible inspiration for the journalist and of joy to his readers springs from this heritage common to all humanity, too often neglected to give way to the tinsel of the ephemeral and to the gossip of the transitory! Without making a show of erudition, however—as is suitable for a newspaper which is destined for all as a source of information and of serene comfort—it is possible to draw constant and substantial inspiration from such a vast panorama of living, interesting and pleasing reality.

Beloved sons! Do not be discouraged by the daily difficulties under which your work is performed, but know how to animate it with the generosity and the enthusiasm born of your highest convictions. We are close to you—with paternal attention, with lively interest in your problems, with the help available to Us and especially with prayer. May the Lord grant you always to keep faith with your intentions. May He increase your activity to an evermore fruitful efficacy and sustain your union in its undertakings, rallying around it all those good and valuable energies which, when united, can do so much good through the knowledge and appreciation of the talents proper to each journalist placed at the service of all.

These are Our most ardent wishes, Our cordial aspirations. And in token of the paternal affection that We cherish for each one of you, We are happy to give you Our special, comforting apostolic benediction. We extend it to the whole Union and to those who are closest and dearest to you within the bonds of family, profession and friendship.

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7. *Discorsi, Messaggi, Colloqui*, I, 486.



## THE APOSTOLATE OF A GOOD PRESS

*Translation of an address by His Holiness, Pope John XXIII on May 4, 1959 to the Italian Catholic Press Congress. Need for truth and charity in the field of Catholic Press.*

We cordially welcome you, journalists and associates of the Italian Catholic press and general publishing media, meeting in Rome for the third national convention.

It could be said that the convention has been carried out along two different lines: one organizational and technical and the other spiritual and of the apostolate.

Regarding the first with which We are familiar, We do not intend to dwell on it with you. We realize the importance of it well enough. It suffices to reflect that probably because of the little care given in the past to this area, the Catholic press, in general, did not have that dominion over public opinion which was exercised by other newspapers technically well produced and, which, therefore, had an easier time in conveying opinion and viewpoints not always in line with Catholic doctrine.

Glancing over the program of your work of the last few days, We noticed the variety and importance of the themes dealt with regarding this question. We are glad of it and in this matter We encourage you to be healthily modern.

Having said this, We wish to record how the whole pattern of your congress is permeated with a strong desire for expansion and uplifting and We praise you for it. But if your apostolate is to be effective for the cause of God, of the Church and of souls, the ends for which you use the instruments of your profession must always be borne in mind.

They are above all "arma veritatis" (weapons of truth).

The defection from the age-old philosophy by modern thought has caused many people to neglect divine truth, (to act) as if it were the reasonable object of human intelligence. Modern philosophic relativism repeats the sceptical question of Pilate "What is truth?"<sup>1</sup>

But you know well that God is essentially truth. Christ is truth.<sup>2</sup> The Holy Ghost is the spirit of truth.<sup>3</sup>

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1. *John* 18, 38.

2. *John* 14,6.

3. *John* 16,13.

The reflection of this divine light, Dante would say<sup>4</sup>, "penetrates through the universe and shines more in one part and less elsewhere," but it penetrates above all in the most intimate part of the human mind that is made for the knowledge of truth and for the love derived therefrom: "Quid anima desiderat" exclaims St. Augustine, "nisi veritatem?" (What does the mind desire unless truth?)

Therefore, it is the duty of every man, and all the more of every Christian, to bear witness to truth. In a completely specialized world you journalists must, because of professional conscience, be the cultivators of truth, so that truth, so often trampled upon and betrayed by communications means, may triumph.

The Catholic journalists, writers and workers in the field, moreover, are called to a still higher responsibility. Their media are not, in fact, only for truth, but also charity: "Arma caritatis!" (Weapons of love) directed, therefore, toward elevating the minds, edifying what is good and radiating virtue in souls.

We do not wish to pause to draw a picture, that would be sad, of the evil which so much printed matter produces with its immorality and malice. And it is with a truly afflicted and anguished mind that we consider the enormous harm created in so many consciences, above all in the consciences of youth, by certain printed matter by means of the written word and even more by illustrations.

May the Lord grant that there be few parents who do not feel the serious duty of not becoming accomplices to the ruining of their children. We know, in fact, that a dangerous trap is created by those illustrated dailies and periodicals which offer an attractive mixture of what is serious and profane—and sometimes even indecent—under the pretext of complete information or of publicity.

It is precisely to replace this apparently harmless and, therefore, all the more pernicious printed matter within Christian families that there must be organizational and technical progress in the Catholic publishing field, so that it thus becomes a matter of substance.

There is, finally, a certain press that sins seriously against truth and against charity, that lies to inspire hatred; a press

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4. Cfr. *Paradise* 1-2-3.

that seems to have as its sole program to lead simple souls to perdition; to distort the truth every day, to interpret incorrectly every expression of the Church's teaching authority and to deal blows to the Church so as to take love away from Christ; to fight Jesus Christ in order to fight God Himself. And this often under the deceitful aspect of hastening the solution of problems which harass the workers, the weak and the undefended.

With what spirit, therefore, should you use the instruments of the press? "In all things," We say to you with St. Paul, "taking up the shield of faith with which you may be able to quench all the fiery darts of the most wicked one. And take unto you the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, that is, the word of God."<sup>5</sup>

In the same letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul offers the motto which can guide the steps of each one on this arduous road: "Practice the truth in love."<sup>6</sup>

In love! Love in writing and also in polemics does not weaken the truth; indeed, it strengthens it because it makes it more acceptable. "Interficate errores," (destroy error), said St. Augustine "diligite errantes" (love the erring).

Without renouncing any of the rights of truth, how much sweeter it would be if one used in polemics "less vinegar and more honey," according to the well known phrase of St. Francis de Sales.

We would like to point out as model for the Christian polemicist a great Italian layman who, in his polemics, was an example of humility and charity, Alessandro Manzoni. In his *Observations on Catholic Morals* he presents himself to the reader as the "weak but sincere apologist of a moral whose goal is love," and though feeling "the duty to speak for truth" he always keeps his polemics under the shield of charity.

May it be likewise with you, the fearless defenders of truth, nevertheless loyal and generous with adversaries because "the love of Christ impels us"<sup>7</sup> always and everywhere.

We cannot now take leave of you without saying to all (and to each one according to his specific activity and competence) an explicit word of warm encouragement to spend your individual energies for the prosperity and circulation of a good press in the most vast and profound meaning of the phrase.

5. *Ephes.* 6, 16-17.

6. *Ephes.* 4, 14.

7. *Corinthians* 4, 15.

The apostolate of the press in all its forms! Above all, the dailies, so that they may be visible everywhere. But then also the weeklies (magazines), which in every family today are almost the indispensable complement of the daily newspapers—here more than ever technical perfection is necessary. We will add a word on the importance of periodicals, especially the missionary ones and those for cultured, literary or scientific people. Finally, give all the support you can to the Catholic agencies, regarding which it is superfluous to stress how necessary they are and how delicate is their activity. And last, but not least, the love of good books.

The apostolate of the good press, We said, of the good books! But the goodness must not only be found in the purpose and in the intentions. It must also be in the substance—good that coincides with what is true which leads Us to stress the need that the contents be of a high value. Prepare newspapers, books and publications of value and you will thereby be apostles yourselves because the word is the conqueror and is together truth, love and beauty, reflecting Supreme Wisdom, the First Love, Eternal Beauty.

## ON CATHOLIC JOURNALISM

*Translation of an address by His Holiness, Pope John XXIII on October 18, 1959 during an audience given to the staff of "L'Avvenire d'Italia," Catholic daily in Bologna. On the nature, problems and duties of Catholic journalism.*

Beloved sons of the editorial and reportorial family of *L'Avvenire d'Italia*:

This audience assumes a wholly special tone because you represent the daily newspaper which, in its spirit of information and in its most representative men, We have known and appreciated ever since Our young priesthood; because for six years it cooperated with Our pastoral ministry in Venice; and, finally, because today the Pope is encountering officially a Catholic journal that is, in a manner of speaking, an expression of that high and difficult apostolate.

All Our children are equally dear to Us. But it is quite natural that We feel those most near to Us who make an open profession of fidelity to the teachings of the Church and who support its cause. Among these, you occupy a place of the first order.

We have always considered *L'Avvenire d'Italia* an effective bulwark of the Catholic apostolate, and We have been pleased to call attention to it many times, underlining the comforting progress accomplished by it both in its editorial and reportorial departments. But, above all, We see it as shaper of consciences, and this is the most beautiful praise that a newspaper can receive.

Wishing therefore, to recall before such an elite assembly something that is within the theme of this sector of the apostolate, We take the occasion of today's audience for a more elevated treatment of the subject, so that the thought of the Pope and the Church on the most important problem of the Catholic press may be better known, and so that the faithful may give their attention to these matters.

1) That which characterizes and justifies the life of a Catholic newspaper is, above all else, its positive program. As all activities of man, this one is not evaluated by what it is not, or by what it ought not to do—which would be a limitation—but

according to how it fulfills its proper functions with praiseworthy effort and clear vision. Today the Catholic press exists, above all, to exert an active presence and testimony. Its presence must be active, intelligent and alert in respect to the innumerable problems posited by present-day life, so that it may give them an interpretation according to the valid criterion of the eternal truths which reflect upon time; a presence which lets nothing escape, so that it may inform the reader and assist him in forming an enlightened conscience in the face of the interrogations and bewilderments that today's world sets before him. It must be an active presence, therefore, which orientates, clarifies and restores all things to the light of revealed truth.

But there must also be an active testimony; that is, a testimony which takes a position, serene but secure, without compromises and without human respect, with loyalty and patience. The Catholic journalist does not follow the changing caprices of public opinion and even less orients them according to his own pleasure, but he feels the duty to serve the truth, remembering the words of Our Lord Jesus Christ, "Let your light shine before men, in order that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."<sup>1</sup>

In this manner, beloved sons, you may carry out your mission always worthily and pursue it boldly.

2) The dignity of this mission is manifest also in its external form, which ought more to attract and conquer, and with an amiable and gentle grace. We wish to refer to the style that is proper to a Catholic newspaper and that gives to it an unmistakable mark: a style that is always transparent, even when it assumes a bellicose tone, a style characterized by truth, by charity and by respect for the erring, by a gentlemanly and dignified vocabulary.

Unfortunately, it is true that a manner of acting and writing, which is being reflected even in the press dedicated to children—We say it weeping—is making increased headway, trampling often upon the elementary requirements of gentleness, reserve and modesty, and using a terminology and photographic documentation that is repugnant to every honest conscience. In the presence of such a phenomenon, which often conditions the success of a resolute press, the Catholic journalist can be ensnared for a moment by the lure of following the current, justifying a vision less severe

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1. *Matt.* 5:16.

than reality, and conceding to less edifying facts of the news more than they warrant.

Well, beloved sons, the style of your newspaper cannot permit such a veering of conscience. Confronted with the ability of the "children of this world"<sup>2</sup>, may you will and continue to react with your good sense, with your faith and your courage. Educate your readers to an appreciation of what is good, true and beautiful. Know then how to draw the material of your services from the inexhaustible fountains of goodness, truth and beauty that spring from the illustration of the various epochs of history, of the world of art and poetry, from the conquests of science, from the marvelous life of the universe, and from the travels of explorers and missionaries. What splendid horizons can be offered to well-educated families, without however making dull with erudite display those pages destined for the serene parentheses of time in one's daily labor.

Do not let it be said that the labor of the Catholic journalist is more difficult because it is "bound" more to the requirements of moral norms, but let it be demonstrated with facts that it can be developed with open breath of view and information, because, as the apostle affirms, "All things are yours . . . and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's."<sup>3</sup>

3) Finally, the newspaper that expresses and defends Christian doctrine must live on the fervor of Catholics. This is an elementary truth but one which, in practice, is understood by few. Taking, therefore, the occasion of this audience, We want to open to Our beloved sons the hope of Our heart. We trust that many of the clergy and the laity, but especially he who has the exact measure of the Christian sense, wish to understand that one of the sacred Christian duties is that of religious and social instruction. It is true that this, according to the norms of the Council of Trent, of the synods and of the more recent instructions of the Roman Pontiffs, must be given through the pastoral teaching of the bishops and through the catechetical instructions imparted by pastors.

But in practice this vital word reaches few, also because of the conditions of labor and because of various activities, and because of discomforts and changes in places of residence in which many find themselves. Well then, one of the most powerful

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2. *Luke* 16:8.

3. *I Cor.* 3:22-23).

means by which one is able to serve the word of God by entering homes and making it understood and loved is precisely the Catholic press.

If from this there is derived a grave responsibility for all Catholics to support it and disseminate it, the burden is no less grave that weighs upon your mission, which also because of this becomes high and solemn: To render good service to the word of God, making it resound in all its beauty and newness, without impoverishing it or altering it, but rendering it vital and attractive. What honor, what merit before God and before men!

There remains, Our beloved sons, for Us to end Our words of trust and encouragement with a request suggested to Us by the day's liturgical feast, from which there springs spontaneously an auspicious symbol for your labor as Catholic journalists and for all the elect and steady army of *L'Avvenire d'Italia*.

Today is October 18, the feast of St. Luke, third evangelist. Is there for the good people who work at Bologna "*propter veritatem et justitiam et pacem*" for the sake of truth and justice and peace, a more familiar and more melodic voice than that of St. Luke and the Madonna of St. Luke, who from the sunny hill (overlooking Bologna), serenely stands above and protects the towered city, laden with ancient religious and civic glories, stretched out on the plain in dedication to the intense fervor of the human fatigue which comes from resounding labor?

Reciting Our breviary in the first hours of the morning and already thinking of the meeting of this happy morning with you of the family of *L'Avvenire*, We read through the colored pages of Exechiel, which the liturgy dedicates to the celebration of the beloved Evangelist, portrayed in that vision of four cherubim, where symbolism certainly overpowers naturalness; but the prophetic significance is astonishing and exalted. It is exalted for St. Luke, one of the four; and it is exalted for you, for your entering into this daily written affirmation of evangelical truth, brotherhood and Christian peace.

Of these four cherubim it is said that each one moved forward, and all moved together where the spirit directed them, and they moved forward without turning back.

Beloved sons! In your work and in the worries which this work causes to each and every one, such is the precious teaching of St. Luke and of the other three associated with him in the



ministry of evangelization: Always forward, without ever turning back.

You carry this encouraging admonition in the name of your newspaper, *L'Avvenire*, which is not a historic or retrospective work but a continual advance toward spiritual conquests of human and Christian progress for the honor and love of Christ and of His Holy Church, from which flow perennial benefits of prosperity and peace and for the honor of the most beloved country of Italy.

With the sentiments that the solicitude of Our heart has dictated to Us and that We have simply wished to communicate to you, We assure you that Our prayers always accompany you so that, having received the glorious inheritance of a past that so honors you, you may continue it in your daily work, and so that you may keep yourselves well-deserving in the good cause of truth, justice and peace.

In pledge of continuous divine assistance, which We implore on the beloved Catholic daily, We are happy to impart to you all, directors, journalists, editors and workers of *L'Avvenire d'Italia*, and at the same time to all your dear families and to the greater and more dear family of promoters and readers, Our paternal and special apostolic blessing.

## ON OBLIGATIONS OF JOURNALISTS

*Translation of an address given on November 29, 1959  
by His Holiness, Pope John XXIII to members of the  
Italian press. Obligations of journalists toward respon-  
sibility, honesty and truth.*

We are happy this morning to receive members of the third National Congress of the Union of Periodical Press in Italy.

You wished to conclude your work with an act of tribute to the Vicar of Christ. This testimonial of faith is a credit to you, beloved sons and daughters, and We express to you Our greatest pleasure.

From the documentary material that you sent to Us in reference to your organization and present work, We noted with satisfaction that the Catholic press, with some of its qualified publications, is outstandingly represented alongside other publications of wide circulation or those of more limited range.

We are pleased to imagine that spiritually joined to your group is the wider circle of the many who produce your magazines, and that behind you—and with you—is the vast public of readers to whom you regularly bring cultural information and current events, pleasure and pastime—the kaleidoscopic portrayal of the world in which we live.

These observations inspire us to regard briefly and from a high plane the nobleness of a task that involves all those who act in the many and varied forms of production and circulation of books, newspapers and pictures.

It is natural for good souls such as yours to find agreeable the call to that sense of responsibility, honesty and truth, that is like a triple trust—entrusted to your intelligence and conscience—always to be guarded with firmness and fortitude.

The sense of responsibility above all!

Magazines, organized in your Union, are very different in appearance and characteristics, because alongside those of strictly scientific and technical nature—thus reserved for experts—others carry out a task of wide diffusion.

But both, though intended for a different public, have in common the sacred duty of not damaging, not betraying, not humiliating that public, which is not an anonymous mass of people without expression, but is formed of God's children, of our brothers in Christ. In this public there is a generous but

still inexperienced youth; there are mothers and fathers anxious to receive an upright orientation: there are our people basically good and sound.

We cannot conceive of an editor, director or writer of periodical publications who does not feel the responsibility that weighs on his conscience. He carries out his work as a noble profession, as a high mission, ever putting aside through sincere conviction whatever is less beautiful or less good. Because if in your magazines even one article or one picture should offend the precious sanctuary of the soul, let Us then say that any other merit, any title of praise or success would be very tainted because it would be built on dangerous compromises.

This sense of responsibility is based upon your natural and Christian virtues, and We would like to render it in a single phrase: *honesty* without mitigation, in life as well as in the professions.

This honesty is expressed, first of all, in a respect for the laws of God and for positive and civil legislation, conforming with the acclaimed voice of the divine laws and of their echo in single consciences enlightened by reason and faith.

Briefly, this honesty signifies coherence, sincerity, a sense of one's limits, humility, consideration, prudence.

It makes one avoid evil and seek good, without allowing one to be misled by any opportunism, as pagan thinkers themselves have well affirmed: "Because if we do not let ourselves be impelled toward goodness"—as Cicero says—"out of consideration for what is honest, but instead by interest or gain, then we can call ourselves shrewd but not good".<sup>1</sup>

In this regard permit Us to repeat Our admonishment to representatives of Venetian newspapers on January 30, 1955, to whom We explained the following small verse from the Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians: Be not like children who are bent by every wind of doctrine produced "*in nequitia hominum et in astutia erroris*" (by the evil of men and the slyness of errors).

Instead, be cultivators of truth—"*facientes veritatem in caritate*" (makers of truth in charity)—in the exercise of charity, which for everyone covers a multitude of individual and social sins...To have the truth means to have it on the mind and on the

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1. *De Leg.* 1, 14, 41.

lips—that is, in words and writings—in sure doctrine, and in an honorable and edifying life.<sup>2</sup>

With these recollections, inspired by Our pastoral solicitude for the good of all souls, We extend Our most cordial good wishes to you, so that your work may result in enrichment, joy and consolation for you and for many.

While invoking upon you and your loved ones the abundant gifts of heaven, We gladly impart to you the apostolic blessing.

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2. A. G. Card. Roncalli, *Writings and Discourses*, II, p. 17.

## ON PRESS FREEDOM

*Translation of an address given by His Holiness, Pope John XXIII on December 8, 1959 to a group of Italian Catholic jurists. On dangers of an undisciplined press.*

We are particularly pleased to welcome your distinguished gathering today, beloved sons who claim the honorable and responsible title of Catholic jurists. You have come to Rome to celebrate together the 10th convention, one of a series of yearly meetings organized by your union. This denotes the seriousness of your duty and the constant fruitful diligence of your work, which is considerably productive.

We tell you, therefore, of Our great satisfaction with the program that you pursue with such competence and nobility of feeling. You are conscious of your lofty mission, and you wish to live it fully in the light of God and of a fearless conscience.

The word jurist indicates a highly qualified person, of noble steadfastness and sensitivity. It bespeaks a profound interior intellectual and moral formation which has penetrated to the roots of pensive youth in his fruitful and generous years; a formation that constantly renews itself in an effort of uninterrupted updating.

The word jurist also refers to the strict interpreter of the law, the guardian and defender of juridical principles, the tireless practitioner and fashioner of that development of the law which is anchored in the two tables of Divine Law, which finds its expression and confirmation in the natural law, fashioned by the creative hand of God in every human soul. The jurist gives further application of the commandments of this law to the specific cases of the limitless variety of life, and at the same time he deduces sanctions from the law, according to the image of that God who is a just, strong and wise judge.<sup>1</sup>

Your position as convinced and practicing Catholics throws a special light on your mission, which We do not hesitate to describe as a real and lofty vocation. It finds its consecration and its crowning in the faithful adherence to the laws of God and His Church.

But a special proof of your seriousness of intention and of your work has been offered to Us by your congress' theme, which

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1. Cf. *Ps.* 7:11.

has attracted lively attention: "The Freedom of the Press in the Juridical Order." You have devoted your studies to this question for some time past, dedicating many and scholarly treatments in the specialized reviews published by your union. This is one of the truly crucial points of today's social life, and We are grateful to you for having recalled it once again to the attention of the juridical world.

A long time ago, when We occupied the episcopal throne of St. Mark's, We had the responsibility of serving as president of the Tri-Veneto Episcopal Conference, and the idea occurred to Us then to devote a thoughtful and substantial document to the multiple problems of the press in the name of all the bishops of the Three Venices. And now the Lord has willed Us here and We continue to think of it often, for there pass before Us every day pages of printed material: dailies and periodicals, books and reviews, as well as reports on books and their evaluation from a religious and moral standpoint. In this respect We would like to tell you, with simplicity and paternal confidence, as one would to a gathering of attentive and beloved sons, of a recollection of Ours. We keep in Our heart the memory of the simple and healthy environment in which the Lord wished Us to open Our eyes to the light of this world. From Our adolescence We found Ourselves immersed in a domestic and diocesan tradition that was always open to the knowledge of what is true and beautiful. It was a tradition friendly to the abundance of ancient and modern chronicles of regional life which illustrated the habits and customs of the people.

Returning in Our thoughts to the things seen and heard and the people encountered, We have the joy to say that in Our youth Our spirit was never offended by disconcerting sights, words or accounts, and We can therefore testify to the forthrightness, honesty and delicacy of conscience of Our family and Our people. Here We speak not only of the clergy and teachers with whom We came into contact, but also of the laity of various classes; yes, also the laity, whose fate it was to live in tempestuous and polemical times which were, in certain respects, of less favorable conditions than those in which the Catholic laity live today!

In the memory of the sound uprightness of those days, how can the Pope—who feels the burden of the spiritual responsibility entrusted to Him, though his usual calm may hide from the eyes of the faithful the worries he has--how can he remain

indifferent to the propagation of a chronicle, a publicity and a romanticized exhumation of history which have nothing to do with instruction and honest information? Will not his heart suffer at the thought of the poison that is administered with unrestrained detail to so many innocent people and to youth in their inexperience and in the confusion of their adolescent years, with accounts, exposés and illustrations which have nothing to do with the knowledge of truth, the attraction of what is good and the vision of what is beautiful, but which are clearly excluded from them?

Whoever has the duty of evaluating the things of this world according to the high criterion of the laws of God and of safeguarding the moral beauty of the soul cannot fail to recall solemnly those terrible words of Jesus: "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it were better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of scandals! . . . but woe to the man through whom scandal does come!"<sup>2</sup>

Because of these things We are emboldened, and with entreating voice and strong heart We submit to the attention of parents and educators, of statesmen, legislators and jurists, of publishers and industrialists these following points, trusting in their good will and rectitude:

1) One must above all have a clear conscience, constantly inspired to a right equilibrium, and not inclined to insensibility and laxism.

The right to truth and orientation toward an objective moral norm, founded on the lasting value of the divine law, is anterior and superior to every other right and demand. The freedom of the press must conform and discipline itself in this respect to the divine laws, which are reflected in the human laws, just as the freedom of individuals is conformed and disciplined by positive precepts. And as it is not lawful for the free citizen—by the mere fact that he proclaims himself free—to do violence and bring damage to the freedom, property and life of his neighbor, so neither is it lawful for the press—under the pretext that it must be free—to assail daily and systematically the religious and moral well-being of mankind.

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2. *Matt.* 18:6-7.

Every other requirement, whether of gain or dissemination of news, must be subject to these basic laws.

This clear conscience must be joined to the precise understanding of every man's proper mission. This mission is, in fact, not only informative but formative, and it therefore aims at giving an education. No one can deny that the organs of the press are not only means through which public opinion is expressed, but are also instruments of orientation and formation, and therefore sometimes instruments of the deformation of public opinion.

Now, education is none other than respect of human values, which is gradually formed, but which also can be upset if it is not sufficiently protected against sinful inclinations. This education, according to an ancient and still valid Socratic concept, is a drawing out of the intimacy of the human spirit so as to bring it to light, life and perfection: therefore it cannot be an injection of poison, a conscious enticement to evil inclinations, a contribution toward confusion, or indeed an oppressing and debasing of human dignity.

2) This clear conscience of itself invokes and assumes by its own action those due limitations which must restrain the rights of the press in respect, order and legality. These limitations are imposed upon the desire to speak of or treat a matter in a morbid fashion, upon the eagerness for the sensational and illicit. They are imposed upon the flattery of gain, upon inconsiderateness and levity which violently destroy the innocence of the child and the adolescent while they justify themselves with the claim that this is inevitable and fateful.

It is better to be explicit in this matter, without regard for what one would say out of human respect, so that there will be no connivance with complicity: It is not the love of knowledge, of culture and of truth that guides certain pens, but the unhealthy fire of certain passions and the immoderate desire for notoriety and gain which passes over the insistent appeals of the conscience.

Can it be lawful that one may blatantly offer details and descriptions to the cupidity of curiosity which should be reserved to police laboratories and the magistrature? Is it ever lawful to allow criminal deeds to become the occasion and incentive to vice, when it would be better to throw a veil of pity over these crimes?



Publicity itself, especially in certain fields, obeying nefarious rules, has assumed disconcerting and frightening aspects that cannot be justified except by the deliberate intention of violently affecting the senses and penetrating the force of minds without concern for the wounds left on the soul.

The attentive examination of this painful situation must therefore lead the responsible authorities and offices to a logical and dutiful conclusion: that there must be necessary limitations in the exercise of the freedom of the press. And these limitations must be strictly determined on the basis of the law and through it, so that such a delicate, important and decisive field for the future of every nation may not be left to the mercy of improvisation, feeble self-control, of which much has been said; or worse, to the mercy of bad faith and deceit.

It is up to you also, beloved sons who have made this the object of study and constructive action during this convention, to apply the contribution of your doctrine and also your authority as Catholic journalists to the solution of this very serious problem.

3) Finally, there must be clearcut positions and a positive program.

By natural disposition of mind We do not like to apply—and only rarely do We apply—strong expressions to the multiple situations of social life. We do so only when We feel confident that they can be improved. But in this case We feel the need to say everything, and to confide Our anxieties and Our hopes to those who are Our friends and brothers—brothers because of the practice of the Catholic Faith and also because of the mutual sincere and human feeling we share on this matter of the degenerating press and the valuation made of writers worthy of the name.

The firm positions required of Catholics are therefore as follows: not to have fear of being silenced as “scrupulous” and exaggerators in their attitude of disapproval of a certain press; hence, not to buy, nor credit, nor favor or even speak of the perverse press; not to fear to avail oneself of every means of channeling this sector toward a human and civilized discipline, even before channeling it toward a Christian discipline. It is the Catholics who are called principally to this work of defense and firmness and also all those who have an honest conscience and a sincere desire to be useful to society, because in this

field above all one should feel the seriousness of the sin of omission.

As for the positive program to be followed: After noting how legislation has made gigantic progress in the defense of the rights of the human person, it must be agreed that the same cannot be said regarding the press. Yet also here it is a question of a fundamental right that concerns personal freedom: and "the protection of this freedom," as was stressed by Our predecessor Pius XII in 1947, "is the aim of every juridical order worthy of that name. . . One would legalize licentiousness if one allowed the press. . . to undermine the religious and moral foundations of the life of the people. One need not even be Christian to understand and accept this principle. The use of reason and of a sound moral and juridical sense, undisturbed by passions, is enough".<sup>3</sup>

Now the scope of the many congresses and individual meetings treating of studies and publications should be to enlighten, convince and clear the air of these questions.

The responsibility with which each person feels himself invested will be for men of science—as well as for all people of good will and lucid mind—a great incentive to act quickly and well, to move promptly and with a spirit of apostolate.

The love of truth, the constancy of one's own convictions and sincere zeal for souls will be an impetus for all those who have at heart the honor of the Church and the salvation of society. May this program be enlivened for you by the words of the Apostle: "And in doing good let us not grow tired; for in due time we shall reap if we do not relax. Therefore, while we have time, let us do good to all men, but especially to those who are of the household of faith".<sup>4</sup>

Beloved sons! We have acquainted you with Our profound anxieties and worries, and having done so has afforded Us some relief, like a person who has rid himself of a weight burdening his soul: "*dixi et liberavi animam meam*" (I have spoken and unburdened my soul). And We are now comforted by the thought that We find in you a full understanding of the seriousness of the problems, together with a willing intention of remedying them.

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3. Discourses and Radio Messages, vol. VIII, Jan. 8, 1947, p.369.

4. Gal. 6:9 - 10

Continue with your studies and with the light of good example that you give. We invoke upon you the fullness of divine gifts through the maternal intercession of the Immaculate Virgin, Mother of Good Counsel, so that you may be sustained in your labors, encouraged in good will and be given serenity of conscience.

As a token of the heavenly favors, We are happy to impart to you, as well as to the worthy president, all the members of the Union of Italian Catholic Jurists and to the people dear to you, the propitiatory apostolic benediction.

