

THE POPE

Catholic Journalists Must Respect Pluralism

Vatican City (NC) — Following is excerpted from the NC News translation of the Vatican text of Pope John Paul II's French-language talk April 23 to editors, journalists and readers of the French Catholic daily La Croix, celebrating its centenary.

You have a prodigious period of vitality behind you, and the archives of that period contain documents which are



precious for the whole history of the Church in France over the last century. It is good to remember the courageous initiatives which have marked its way, key periods, remarkable personages, and above all the spirit which has generally supported the editors, and which "showed the colors" of La Croix from its first day on: that is, the intention to give testimony loudly and clearly, through events, of the Catholic faith, of fidelity to the Church, attachment to the pope, missionary sense, defense of human and Christian values, and

to do so in a way so as to widely reach the people.

You have had to rejuvenate your forms of presentation several times — you have done so again quite recently. This is a technical field which you have painstakingly studied, while taking account of the requirements of modern journalism and current religious needs, above all for the sake of reaching the younger generations. Choice of the best formula obviously comes under your responsibility, but you do not forget that form is at the service of basic content. This should not be only the outcome of the way readers, actual or potential, think and of contemporary mentalities, since the newspaper is intended to have a Christian reference and to bear the Gospel message. It is also for the episcopate of the country to express its evaluation of this service to the Church, and to support it.

The fact that you represent a Catholic journal, open to the preoccupations of other Christians and having a national and daily readership, puts you in a peerless position. And it is understandable that it is considered important and even indispensable for the Church in France — but also beyond the frontiers of France, in French-speaking countries particularly, and at Rome itself — to see a journal like La Croix maintained and perfected, in spite of material difficulties and trials of every sort. This makes you deserving of wide and grateful recognition, and creates a great responsibility for you at the same time.

In saying this, I am not forgetting other efforts also contributing to religious information. I mean the provincial press with a Christian slant, Catholic weeklies, and also the efforts of religious correspondents in the neutral press. The high number of these professionals testifies to the interest which the Church in general and Church activities stimulate, above all since the council.

It is with this general picture in mind, that I will now dwell upon two requirements for Catholic news publications. These requirements concern truth: truth in presenting daily reality, truth in witness made in favor of the faith.

Truth in describing and commenting upon facts. The subtitle of La Croix is "the event." This commits you to reporting the major events of your country, of the life of the world and of the Church. It is up to you to bring out the essential in the event and to respect the authenticity of the event and its various aspects: "everything for the essentials," as you yourselves say. This obviously obliges you not to depend on certain frail information obtained from questionable sources. It obliges you not to enlarge facts having only minor importance, not to yield to the pressure of common opinion or what is presumed to be such, to the dangerous and interested solicitations of the sensational, not to give allegiance to a partisan option, above all when it is a question of something in the political field. For honesty's sake, you have to hold to your liberty jealously, to your independence, to service of the truth. And that alone is already a remarkable testimony.

When we speak of significant facts, we mean those which are of importance for an objective judgment on the reality of the life of mankind, under cultural, economic, political, pedagogical, and religious aspects. Such reporting will favor reflection on the values which are the foundation of mankind and such reporting will make it possible to grasp the evangelical appeal emerging therefrom. As regards religious facts, the believing information worker will do a work of truth, by trying to present such a fact from within, with reference to the intention of the faith and the mystery dwelling in it. He will not present it from the outside only, nor as a simple cultural fact.

Like the public, you like to favor "actuality," that is "lived" testimonies. The problem is then one of choosing, in a balanced way, from overall reality, what is going to constitute the best report, in the least partial or partisan way. You must also bear in mind that the "lived" is not necessarily to be confused with the "message." And this brings us to our second point.

Truth in the testimony to the faith. You wish your newspaper to be the most representative expression for public opinion of what Christians think.

This raises the question of the importance of religious

information properly so called. It seems that the space allowed to this is tending to diminish in the great information media (press, radio, television). It often happens, alas, that such information is badly treated. It is regarded from a very secondary or distorted point of view. This situation causes frustration in a large part of public opinion in the country, which is made up of Catholics to a major extent. This frustration occurs particularly among convinced Christians, and gives rise to a rightful thirst to be better informed on what they have at heart, for example, on the way in which the Church carries out her manifold mission. Where might they find such religious information better than in a newspaper affirming its Christian identity? And who could do more for such information than a Catholic journalist? He has the possibility and also the duty to provide all with means for gaining better understanding and conducting a dialogue in depth, where the reality of life is regarded in the light of the faith. So, care must be taken not to reduce information and articles touching on questions of faith.

In any case, you will well understand that it would be equivocal, dangerous, and finally suicidal to take up an attitude of detachment from the institution of the Church, the hierarchical Church, even though readers who have lost some ecclesial sense call for this attitude. It is certainly important not to limit yourselves to the official events of the Church: The Church is also the daily life of Christians and their associations. But the Church's institutions are themselves creators of events, which have very wide repercussions, and the orientations provided by the magisterium and responsible pastors (bishops) enable to be verified the fidelity of the "lived" to the Catholic faith. In the life of Christians many diverse initiatives and opinions may be shared in many sectors.

It is healthy to take account of this pluralism in a spirit of dialogue, at a time when too many incomprehensions, inflexibilities, and intolerances set groups in society and in the Church against each other. Nevertheless, the description given of this Christian pluralism, if it is intended to have a Christian reference, assumes that there should be a clear demarcation of what is legitimate in opinions, on the doctrinal, ethical, liturgical, and social levels, and assumes that morals value should be preserved and defended, values such as respect for life, for human dignity, for fundamental liberties — including information and instruction — protection of the poor and the weak. If it is a question of other options, which are reported for the sake of fidelity to reality, in order to contribute to further clarification and always in respect for persons, readers ought to have sufficient means for discerning which attitude is coherent with faith and ecclesial sense.

To sum up, the Catholic newspaper itself as a whole, and the editorial staff which speaks in its name, ought to testify within the truth of the Catholic faith, the faith of the Church, to such a degree that readers, whoever they be, may be sure of finding the work of the believer there, the word of the faithful believer, who is happy to believe in and belong to the Church, his mother, whom he is learning to contemplate and love from within. This forms part of the fidelity without which, as you say, you would lose your reason for being. This relates to your visit here today, to

the attachment to the Church which you profess and which you wish to strengthen by coming to the successor of Peter. At the same time, your readers will there find a true enlightenment on the various events of the day. It will enable them to form a human and Christian judgment fit for serving and promoting the whole man, and will open up ways to hope and love. Is not this the specific mark of Catholic journalism, on these two points?

This is a whole program. It is suggested by the significant title: La Croix, l'évenement (the cross, the event). That calls for honesty and well-seasoned Christian convictions and is an authentic art. I believe it was Father Gabel who said: "The Catholic journalist is a mediator, as regards events, among doctrine, the Church's orientations, and his public." Yes, this is a difficult but impassioned art, and a very necessary one. I am sure that, in the powerful and very discordant concert of the media, you will put your heart into the continued fulfilling of your mission well, and taking up of the challenge, in the same spirit as your predecessors. I encourage you in this, and implore the light and the power of the Holy Spirit upon you. To you yourselves, to the Assumptionist Fathers, to the editorial staff and all personnel of La Croix, to your readers and to your families, I give my apostolic blessing.

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Peace Prayer

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Caras to Speak

Roger Caras, internationally known author and environmentalist, will address the Humane Society's annual awards banquet Thursday,

May 5, at the Mapledale Party House. Tickets for the event are \$15 and are reserved by calling the Humane Society shelter 223-1330