

“FREEDOM OF INFORMATION IS A BASIC HUMAN RIGHT”

In an interview on Human Rights Day, Canadian communication expert and Holy See delegate to the UN General Assembly, Professor Andrew Ruszkowski commented on the Holy See's interest in freedom of information, tracing its development in the teachings of Pius XII, John XXIII, and Paul VI, as well as in the Conciliar Decree *Inter Mirifica* on Mass Communication and in the Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio*.

The interest of the Holy See in this topic, according to Professor Ruszkowski, appears as a logical consequence of the Church's care for the personal growth of human beings as individuals. He stated that the moral dimension of such a growth requires both the availability of data and the freedom of choice between data provided by different sources. Furthermore, he added, there is an irony in the fact that some of the people who strongly objected to any kind of data control by the Churches seem now most willing to accept a total control by State authorities.

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In response to a question about freedom of information and Human Rights Day, 1976, the Canadian specialist and director of the Institute of Social Communication at the University of Saint-Paul in Ottawa responded: "Human Rights Day in 1976, as at any other date, for that matter, would be a grotesque farce, if it would not stress a fundamental right absolutely necessary for any practical enforcement of other human rights. Originally, the concept of freedom of information was related to freedom of the press and sometimes identified with freedom of individual expression or misused to justify abuses by unscrupulous publishers. In our time, we understand by right of information not only the right to freely

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express opinions and communicate data, but also, indeed, most of all, the right to gather information from various sources. In the Church's view, this right creates also, on the part of each individual person, a corresponding duty to seek information according to his or her position in society. Only the knowledge resulting from such information can make it possible for each one to fully enjoy the specific human rights that society is supposed to respect, as well as to make a positive contribution to the body politic."

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Professor Ruzkowski was asked for the reason for his personal interest in the topic. He indicated that he had been influenced by a discussion about determinism and free will by the Belgian Canon Jacques Leclerc who specifies several conditions necessary for the use of free will. Ruzkowski concluded that information about existing alternatives is a basic condition for free acts. He believes that information about alternatives is an absolute must if the "human-being aspires to act morally or as a Christian would say, to respond to God's will." His position is that freedom of information is a corner stone for the whole structure of human rights.