I am very pleased to be here with you to participate in this very important Conference. I would like to begin by expressing the profound appreciation of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications for the initiative and efforts of CELAM in organizing this event. In particular, I would like to convey to you all the best wishes of the President of the Council, Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli, who very much wanted to be present but is obliged to remain in Rome due to his participation at the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops.

I am personally very happy to represent the Council: in the first place, because the theme you are addressing is an intrinsically important one for all of us who work in the realm of communications and are conscious, therefore, of the particular ethical challenges that are raised by recent developments in this field, and, in the second place, because this Conference is one of the first fruits of an international Congress that our Council organized last year for Faculties/Schools of Communications in Catholic Universities with a view to enabling them to reflect together on issues concerning identity and mission. Notwithstanding, the hugely varied range of institutions represented - 91 universities from 44 different countries and all the continents - and the different economic, political and regulatory contexts within which they operate, there was general agreement on the centrality of ethics both as an academic issue and as a formational concern for Faculties and Schools of Communications.

In my intervention this morning, I will begin by reflecting on the increased attention to ethics both as an academic discipline and as a public discourse. I will then seek to elucidate some insights, derived from the emerging discipline of professional ethics, which should prove useful in a consideration of the ethics of communications. Finally, I would like to reflect on the particular context within which faculties of communications operate in a Catholic University and how the teaching of ethics may be shaped by its institutional identity and mission. In all of this, I will be guided by your previous work and, particularly, by your linkage of "the ethics of communications" and "the communication of ethics". This linkage expresses most succinctly the insight that, in teaching ethics, how we teach is often as important as what we teach.

The concern to establish the significance of ethics as a foundational academic discipline within the curricula of Schools of Communication is itself the product of an increased societal awareness of the importance of professional ethics. The importance of medical ethics has long been recognized, but in recent years there has been a more intense focus on the importance of ethics for those who exercise their professions in the arena of law and politics, in the world of commerce and finance and in the areas of media, marketing and journalism. It was interesting to note that the most quoted remark from Pope Benedict’s Message for the 42nd World Communications Day in 2008 was his observation that: Many people now think there is a need, in this sphere, for "info-ethics", just as we have bioethics in the field of medicine and in scientific research linked to life. His insight clearly touched a nerve and was widely reported as a call for the foundation of a new discipline of "info-ethics". This call was favourable received by a wide range of commentators, including many from outside the Catholic, or even religious, sphere. In the interests of accuracy, it should be pointed out the concept was not, as said by some, a papal creation but rather the endorsement of a concept that had enjoyed some currency at UNESCO and in the academic world. The response of people to the Pope’s use of the term demonstrates, above all, a public appetite for greater attention to be given to the ethical dimensions of communications. The Message itself - "The Media: At the Crossroads between Self-Promotion and Service. Searching for the Truth in order to Share it with Others." - provides a succinct presentation of some of the key ethical principles and values that should guide communications professionals.
Together with the earlier, and often overlooked, document of our Council, Ethics in Communications (2000), the Message would be a very important resource for those who are looking to identify some basic guidelines for the development of a course or programme on media ethics.

**Ethics and Communications: An Intrinsic Connection**

The public concern about ethics has not gone unnoticed by the various professions. If you google the words "code + professional + ethics", you will discover that an extraordinary number of professions have in recent years sought to codify their ethical responsibilities. The raised profile of ethics is also reflected in the expansion of academic interest in Professional Ethics - in the Anglo-Saxon world, many former faculties of moral philosophy or ethics have been re-branded as schools of applied or professional ethics. My own academic background is in the areas of law and ethics and for many years, in Ireland, I worked as a teacher of bioethics. In more recent years, I found myself being invited to address associations of business, legal and educational professionals as they sought to articulate their ethical obligations and responsibilities.

I would like to suggest that the very idea of a profession can be a very useful starting point for our reflection on how Faculties of Communications should address the issues of teaching ethics to aspirant communications professionals. A profession is usually constituted by people who share specialized knowledge and expertise that enable them to provide important services to the general community and meet significant human needs. Doctors are experts in the care of health; lawyers are specialists in assisting people to protect their rights and interests and in the public goods of justice and order, etc. In all cases, professionals by the very nature of their skills and expertise are obliged to stand for (profess) certain value. These values are not imposed externally but are determined by the very nature of the professions they are privileged to exercise. This methodology would suggest that an effort to reflect on the ethics of communications - be that ethics for journalists, for PR professionals or for marketing professionals - should begin with a reflection on the nature of the skills and expertise possessed by such professionals and the human goods they seek to serve. Even the most superficial reflection will reveal that a concern for truth will be a core ethical value. This intuition was articulated by Pope Benedict when he addressed the participants at the aforementioned Congress organized by our Council in May 2008: It is self-evident that at the heart of any serious reflection on the nature and purpose of human communications there must be an engagement with questions of truth. A communicator can attempt to inform, to educate, to entertain, to convince, to comfort; but the final worth of any communication lies in its truthfulness. In one of the earliest reflections on the nature of communication, Plato highlighted the dangers of any type of communication that seeks to promote the aims and purposes of the communicator or those by whom he or she is employed without consideration for the truth of what is communicated. No less worth recalling is Cato the Elder's sober definition of the orator; vir bonus dicendi peritus a good or honest man skilled in communicating. The art of communication is by its nature linked to an ethical value, to the virtues that are the foundation of morality.

It also follows from this understanding that it falls to a profession to articulate its core ethical values and commitments. Ethics should not be imposed arbitrarily on professions from without - ethics should be born from the reflections and experiences of "thoughtful practitioners". Those who are specialists in the area of ethics - theologians, philosophers and lawyers - can help professionals to understand and appreciate the underlying theories and traditions of formal ethical reflection; they can help professionals to articulate, formulate and codify their ethical responsibilities. Ethics should not, however, be left to the so-called experts; serious professional ethics requires the co-operation of those who have formal training in ethics and those who understand and are experienced in the exercise of the skills and expertise that define their profession. In a University context, it is important that the "ethics course" is not handed over to the philosophy or theology department nor that it would be taught without their assistance but that it is the product of a serious and sustained inter-disciplinary collaboration.
Professional Ethics: Guiding Insights

In the area of professional ethics, the attempt to articulate ethical responsibilities usually proceeds from an analysis of the fundamental human needs that the profession strives to serve. We have already noted the fundamental centrality of the commitment to truth in the dissemination and sharing of that information and knowledge which is necessary to enable individuals make responsible choices and societies to flourish. Ethics in Communications elaborates on this insight: the media are called to serve human dignity by helping people live well and function as persons in community. Media do this by encouraging men and women to be conscious of their dignity, enter into the thoughts and feelings of others, cultivate a sense of mutual responsibility, and grow in personal freedom, in respect for others’ freedom, and in the capacity for dialogue. The document goes on to spell out the contribution of media to the promotion of human well-being in different sectors:

**Economic** - the market can serve the person (cf. Centesimus Annus, 34), and media play an indispensable role in a market economy. Social communication supports business and commerce fosters responsible competition that serves the public interest, and enables people to make informed choices by telling them about the availability and features of products.

**Political** - Media are indispensable in today's democratic societies. They supply information about issues and events, office holders and candidates for office. They enable leaders to communicate quickly and directly with the public about urgent matters. They are important instruments of accountability, turning the spotlight on incompetence, corruption, and abuses of trust, while also calling attention to instances of competence, public-spiritedness, and devotion to duty.

**Cultural** - The means of social communication offer people access to literature, drama, music, and art otherwise unavailable to them, and so promote human development in respect to knowledge and wisdom and beauty.

**Educational** - The media are important tools of education in many contexts, from school to workplace, and at many stages in life.

**Religious** - Many people's religious lives are greatly enriched through the media. They carry news and information about religious events, ideas, and personalities; they serve as vehicles for evangelization and catechesis.

If social communications professional are to ensure that the their skills and knowledge are genuinely at the service of the general human good and that they realize the great potential identified above, they must be vigilant to maintain an ethical commitment to meeting the best interests of others over their own particular needs. One moral theologian has defined this commitment as requiring professionals not to view their skills and knowledge "as possessions for private financial gain or social status" but as talents to be put at service of others even if that is at a high personal cost and requires sacrifice.

In the field of medicine, we have learned that we ought not to do everything we can do. It is equally true of the field of communications that "not everything that is technically possible is ethically permissible." The true measure of progress is not to be found in the technical or logistical efficiency of the new means of communications alone but in the purposes which they serve. Those in the media who use the new technologies are faced with a choice. They can seek to ensure that the new technologies, and the enhanced potential for communication that they offer, are placed at the service of individuals and communities in their search for the truth or they can allow them to be used to promote their own interests and/or the interests of those they represent in ways that manipulate individuals and communities. It is only when these technologies are used to serve the true wellbeing of individual persons and of human communities that we can say that they are truly instruments of progress.
Faculties of Communication should encourage those who will work in the media to attend to the great responsibilities that rest with them and to uphold the highest standards of their professions. In particular, they should be strengthened in their commitment to make known the truth and to defend it "against those who tend to deny or destroy it." Media professionals ought to be invited to defend the ethical underpinnings of their profession and to ensure that the "centrality and the inviolable dignity of the human person" are always vindicated. They must be reminded that these ethical commitments can be eroded by factors such as competition for audiences, commercial pressures and ideological prejudices. They should be alerted to the danger of the media becoming the voice of "economic materialism and ethical relativism".

A distinguishing feature of professional ethics, which could help to orientate the approach to communications ethics in a faculty of communications, is the establishment of structures of accountability. The American specialist in ethics, William F. May, has said that: In professional ethics today, the test of moral seriousness may depend not simply upon personal compliance with moral principles but upon the courage to hold others accountable. Faculties could profitably try to instil in their students the sense of what it means to belong to a profession; to a community which seeks to strengthen the ethical commitments of its members and is never afraid to disown unethical and destructive practises.

**Foundational Ethics: Useful Distinctions**

Within academic schools of philosophy it is common to distinguish between fundamental or foundational ethics and special or applied ethics. While the attention of the latter focuses on specific issues and disciplines, the former tends to be concerned with more basic questions about what it means to talk of good and evil or right and wrong and how it is possible to make ethical judgments. Even though the ethics of communications clearly belongs to the realm of special ethics; it would be a great mistake not to attend to some of the material that would normally be associated with fundamental ethics. In particular, it is important that students of communications would be encouraged to study the different ethical theories and to engage critically with the, often unacknowledged, influence of these theories on contemporary debates about ethics. Without even being aware of it, many students in their approach to ethics are guided by insights that are rooted in utilitarianism (the end justifies the means), positivism (what is legal is ethical), emotivism (our feelings can tell us what is right and wrong) or relativism (there are no absolutes in the area of ethics). There is a real value in asking the students to study these theories so that they can begin to examine more explicitly the criteria for judging right and wrong.

Students should be introduced to the study of the objective ethical theories, such as the natural moral law tradition, which are rooted in the conviction that the rightness or wrongness of human ethical choices can be discerned by a process of reflection on what it means to be human. Choices which, by their very nature, promote the human flourishing of individuals and society are judged to be good; while those that are intrinsically damaging to the well-being of persons and of human community are judged to be bad. (Lies, for example, are judged to be inherently unethical, because by their nature they undermine the trust that is necessary for good personal and community relationships, even though one might imagine a specific situation where a lie might seem to bring particular advantages.) These objective theories, which are correctly seen as involving a commitment to a method of moral reasoning rather than as providing a shortcut to truth, require that humans work together to decide which choices and practises are to be encouraged and which should be discouraged. This discernment requires a careful consideration of all the relevant perspectives that are brought to ethical debates by different protagonists so that our human efforts to work out what is ethical are as objective as possible. These theories promote a dialogical approach to ethics, that is accessible to all human beings notwithstanding their religious or ideological differences, and provide a theoretical underpinning for the possibility of the genuine public debating of ethical issues. It is a shared commitment to
searching for truth, rooted in the conviction of the ultimate objectivity of truth, which gives such debates their ultimate value - otherwise they become exercises in coercion and manipulation in which each seeks to assert his or her own view without any reference to the claims of truth.

The importance of imparting to students of communications a sense of the objectivity of truth was articulated succinctly by Pope Benedict at his meeting with the participants during last year’s Congress: The art of communication is by its nature linked to an ethical value, to the virtues that are the foundation of morality. In the light of that definition, I encourage you, as educators, to nourish and reward that passion for truth and goodness that is always strong in the young. Help them give themselves fully to the search for truth. Teach them as well, however, that their passion for truth, which can be well served by a certain methodological scepticism, particularly in matters affecting the public interest, must not be distorted to become a relativistic cynicism in which all claims to truth and beauty are routinely rejected or ignored.

Within the area of fundamental ethics, much attention has been given to the importance of the distinction between normative ethics and “character ethics”. The work of Alistair MacIntyre (among others) has highlighted the reality that ethics is not just about what we do or the rules or norms we should follow; but is also concerned with the type of people we are and the virtues that must be engendered and fostered in ethical agents. If schools or faculties of communications are to be effective promoters of the ethical formation of their students they will not be satisfied merely to teach professional codes of ethics or to articulate ethical norms and rules. They must also seek to form the character of their students. Ethics is never simply about what humans do, but about the kind of people they are. It has long been observed that actio segue esse: it is never enough that someone knows what he or she should do; we should consider how we can shape the character of our students so that they will be possessed of a willingness to live by the highest values. It is important that we enable our students to appreciate the best ethical traditions of their future profession by identifying for them appropriate role models. In this context, it is appropriate to remember that many journalists have given an extraordinary witness to their commitment to the truth. Journalists throughout the world, and particularly in Colombia, have suffered persecution, imprisonment and even death because of this commitment and because of their unwillingness to be silent in the face of injustice and corruption. Their witness is an eloquent testimony to the highest standards to which the media can aspire and their example serves as to encourage all media professionals to strengthen their commitment to the truth and, thereby, to serve the common good of all humanity.

Another distinction from fundamental ethics that could be fruitful for those who would teach the ethics of communications is that between personal and social ethics. In social ethics, much attention is given to the structures within which individuals act as these can radically shape the ethics of their choices. If media professionals wish to be truly ethical, it will not be sufficient for them to be conscientious in examining their own decision making and their personal motivations and intentions; they must also consider the justness or otherwise of the contexts in which they operate and attend to social, political and economic dynamics. Ethical principles and norms relevant in other fields also apply to social communication. Principles of social ethics like solidarity, subsidiarity, justice and equity, and accountability in the use of public resources and the performance of roles of public trust are always applicable. The ethical dimension relates not just to the content of communication (the message) and the process of communication (how the communicating is done) but to fundamental structural and systemic issues, often involving large questions of policy bearing upon the distribution of sophisticated technology and product (who shall be information rich and who shall be information poor?). These questions point to other questions with economic and political implications for ownership and control. At least in open societies with market economies, the largest ethical question of all may be how to balance profit against service to the public interest understood according to an inclusive conception of the common good. (Ethics in Communication)
It is obvious that particular attention must be given to the question of the digital divide. With the increased consciousness of the "information society" and the role of the new technologies in promoting trade, development and scientific progress in a globalized world comes a responsibility to ensure that these networks do not become instruments of exclusion. It would be a tragedy for the future of humanity if the new instruments of communication, which permit the sharing of knowledge and information in a more rapid and effective manner, were not made accessible to those who are already economically and socially marginalized, or if it should contribute only to increasing the gap separating the poor from the new networks that are developing at the service of human socialization and information. (Pope Benedict XVI, World Communications Day Message, 2009)

Catholic Universities: Identity and Mission

When our Council began to organize the Congress on the mission and identity of faculties of communications in a Catholic university, we started with an intuition that it would be neither possible nor desirable to imagine that one could establish a generic ("one size fits all") identity into which all Catholic faculties or schools of communication could be shoehorned. This intuition was vindicated by the observations from the participants during the congress. Many were nervous of any definition that might be used to suggest, however unfairly, that Catholic faculties and schools were somehow less interested in providing the best possible education for their students, be they Catholic or not, and more interested in promoting denominational concerns. It was made clear by others that there is no conflict between a commitment to excellence in terms of the professional formation of students and the values of a Catholic vision of education.

In order to allow for schools and faculties to articulate their Catholic identity having regard for their own particular circumstances, it might be appropriate for them to articulate a mission statement. There are undoubtedly risks involved if the drawing up of such a statement were to be seen as an end in itself and if the values identified are not embedded in the life of an institution: there are, however, significant benefits attaching to the proper use of these instruments. The mission statement can serve as a type of constitution which would be used as a point of reference to guide the various activities of the school or faculty: it could function as an indicator of policy priorities in shaping the curriculum, in recruiting students and staff etc so that the all such decision would be made having regard for the fundamental identity and ethos of the institution. The project of elaborating a mission statement, especially if it is fully inclusive of all the staff and representatives of the student body, can be an extremely valuable process in promoting an awareness of and sense of attachment to the core values of a school or faculty. The availability of such a statement, moreover, can perform a very useful task in alerting potential students to the core commitments of a faculty and enabling them to make an informed choice in their selection of schools.

Such statements would normally include an explicit commitment to the providing the best possible education and formation to their students. The pursuit of excellence - a pursuit that is always contextually determined and that is dependent on the resources available - will never be compromised by the Catholic identity of a school or faculty. This involves a commitment to the highest possible standards of professional formation and personal attention being made available to all students irrespective of class, belief or race. A mission statement should also seek to articulate the values of justice and respect that will guide its dealings with all its stakeholders - students, faculty, ancillary employees and contractors. This is fundamental if our schools and faculties are to vindicate the commitment of Pope Benedict that "first and foremost every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth." (Meeting with Catholic Educators, Washington, 17/04/2008)

In the particular context of a school or faculty of communications, it would be appropriate to articulate a specific commitment to the pursuit of truth and objectivity. This commitment is especially significant in the contemporary context where many academic institutions seem to have abandoned the notion of
truth and are beset by concepts of relativism that seek to deny the existence of objective standards. Pope Benedict has addressed this need: These harmful developments point to the particular urgency of what we might call "intellectual charity". This aspect of charity calls the educator to recognize that the profound responsibility to lead the young to truth is nothing less than an act of love. Indeed, the dignity of education lies in fostering the true perfection and happiness of those to be educated. In practice "intellectual charity" upholds the essential unity of knowledge against the fragmentation which ensues when reason is detached from the pursuit of truth. It guides the young towards the deep satisfaction of exercising freedom in relation to truth, and it strives to articulate the relationship between faith and all aspects of family and civic life. Once their passion for the fullness and unity of truth has been awakened, young people will surely relish the discovery that the question of what they can know opens up the vast adventure of what they ought to do. Here they will experience "in what" and "in whom" it is possible to hope, and be inspired to contribute to society in a way that engenders hope in others. (Ibid).

In the context of the debate about the Catholic identity, I would also suggest that my own professional discipline, moral theology, may have some pertinence. In the post-conciliar period there was a very significant debate concerning the "specificity" or the distinctiveness of Christian ethics. On the one hand, there was the view that Christian ethics would have to be distinctive if it were to be truly rooted in the teaching of Jesus Christ, as found in the scriptures and as specified by the teaching of the Church. This so-called Glaubensethik focussed on the newness of Christian ethics. The alternative view argued that ethics or morality was fundamentally a human phenomenon and that good ethical norms could be determined by rational reflection on the nature of what it is to be human and that no explicit reference to Christ was necessary. Ethics was autonomous and could be identified by human reflection. In the course of the debate, a certain middle ground emerged. It was conceded by the proponents of the first view that the determination of the ethical demands of the scriptures or of the Church required rational reflection. It was also accepted by those arguing for the autonomy of ethics that the human nature itself is itself created by God and that our autonomy should be seen as theonomous. Some commentators sought to reconcile the two positions by suggesting that the distinctiveness of Christian ethics was not to be found in its normative content but rather in the motivation or intentionality of the Christian. They also suggested that any ethical theory that did not take into account issues of motivation and intention would be inadequate. I am conscious that this is a rather reductive account of a very complex debate but I would suggest that in looking for a distinctiveness for Catholic schools or faculties of communication we should not confine our examination to the content (the curriculum and materials taught) alone but should look to the guiding ethos and philosophies of the schools.

This is true also concerning the teaching of ethics. All schools or faculties of communications should seek to promote ethical responsibility among their students. This objective is not confined to Catholic programmes and we should be careful not to suggest that a concern for ethics is exclusive to our institutions. However, in seeking to identify the requirements of best ethical practise and to inculcate these values in its students, the Catholic school or faculty will seek to draw on the rich ethical tradition of our faith. A primary concern will inevitably be to promote a commitment to truth. Other values that will be found in Catholic ethical reflection, albeit not exclusively to it, include the promotion of respect for the dignity and worth of every human being, the refusal to debase humans, the refusal of all words and gestures calculated to promote hatred and intolerance. Catholic Social Teaching frequently alerts us to the importance of communication in the promotion of human solidarity, peace and reconciliation.

The greatest test of an individual's ethical standards or values will often occur in the situation where adherence to his or her own standards is likely to be at a cost to his or her personal interests. We must foster in our students an admiration for those communicators and journalists, believers and unbelievers, who, often at a great cost to themselves, have had the courage to resist the threats or bribes of those who would seek to corrupt or silence them. In seeking to offer a motivation and rationale for such sacrifice, we must not hesitate to point to the great example of the life, death and
resurrection of Jesus Christ who refused to be intimidated by violence and death, and whose faithfulness was vindicated by the Father. The Christian gospel offers us a reason to resist those who seek to deflect us from our highest commitments, moreover as believers we know that we are never alone when we are faithful to serving the good of others.

As we have seen, any serious engagement with questions about communication and the purposes it can serve will lead to an engagement with limit questions about the point and purpose of life. Why be truthful? Why give attention to the plight of those who suffer poverty or are exploited? Why seek to expose the lies or the injustices of those who are rich or powerful. In our curriculums we should open up these questions. This might be done by drawing on those who teach philosophy or theology in our Universities to allow for an interdisciplinary exploration of these ultimate questions. Such questions can also be raised through the consideration of literature and cinema. Such approaches can serve to encourage our students to reflect on the basic questions that are often squeezed out by the busyness of life, especially in our technological age where little space is left for that type of reflection that traditionally was said to be hallmark of a worthwhile life.

In approaching the fundamental questions, an in attempting to respond to the most profound anthropological searching of our students, Catholic schools and faculties should not shy away from a respectful presentation of the most fundamental belief of our Church in the unlimited and gracious nature of God’s love for all people revealed in Jesus Christ. In trying to seek the balance between finding a way of speaking of Jesus, whose spirit gives life and meaning to our social teaching, and respecting the freedom of those of other religious traditions or none, we can turn with profit to the words of Pope Benedict XVI: Charity, furthermore, cannot be used as a means of engaging in what is nowadays considered proselytism. Love is free; it is not practised as a way of achieving other ends. But this does not mean that charitable activity must somehow leave God and Christ aside. For it is always concerned with the whole man. Often the deepest cause of suffering is the very absence of God. Those who practise charity in the Church’s name will never seek to impose the Church’s faith upon others. They realize that a pure and generous love is the best witness to the God in whom we believe and by whom we are driven to love. A Christian knows when it is time to speak of God and when it is better to say nothing and to let love alone speak. (Deus Caritas Est, 31).