

Prepackaged Media Images of the Church (Presidential Address)

“On a global level there is often a prepackaged story” about the Church said Cardinal-designate William Keeler of Baltimore, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the U. S. Catholic Conference, in a presidential address Nov. 14 to the U. S. Bishops meeting in Washington. This prepackaged story tells “of an ailing pope trying to impose an outdated morality on a resistant world, a church preoccupied by sexual issues, hostile to social progress and, now, deaf to the nuances of inclusive language. It is a story of a church of confrontation, entrenched in the past and resisting the aspirations of ordinary people today.” But, Keeler asked, “where is the story of the pope who still does more in a week than most do in a month, of an older man who connects instantly with youth wherever he goes, of a tireless witness to respect for human life and human dignity?” Keeler told the bishops, “You and I have seen the real church as peacemaker. “The church also is an educator, healer, developer - and much more. “Most of all the church is a unique community in the Lord, ” Keeler said. He added: “Our advocacy does not fit ideological or partisan categories. Our witness is not politically correct, but it is unfailingly consistent.” Keeler urged that the discussion he called for a year ago (see *Origins*, Vol. 23, pp. 417ff) between the church and representatives of the media continue. “We in the world of religion do need to be educated, to learn that we must reach out to our people and approach our world through the media whenever we can, “he said. Keeler expressed concern “about some often unreported aspects which reflect the vitality of the Catholic Church in our country, the real Catholic Church. “His text follows. A year ago in this address I spoke about the Catholic Church in the United States, the real church in which we live and worship. And I spoke about the other Catholic Church, the one so often found in media coverage. The response to my talk was heartening, especially the response which came to me from those in the media. Some said I painted with too broad a brush, but most agreed that a real issue had been raised. They took up the discussion among themselves and with their readers and viewers. That discussion should continue and involve in candid dialogue people of faith and those who report on religion. A beginning came when *Commonweal* magazine, assisted by a grant from the Catholic

Communications Campaign, conducted three forums on the media and religion, open exchanges to educate both sides. And we in the world of religion do need to be educated, to learn that we must reach out to our people and approach our world through the media whenever we can. We have said we want to be part of the world of contemporary communications. We have done this in our dioceses and in our conference as well. But how far have we come in our own Catholic communications efforts? Have we become professionally skilled in engaging the media effectively? Many voices are competing for media attention. Have we learned to speak what Pope John Paul II calls “the language of the media” with sufficient force and clarity? Let us take a look at the inclusive language issue – we see it in the context of our church; here we are called to be faithful to our tradition in worship and in proclaiming God’s word, and called also to make that word as intelligible as possible for those who hear it preached. To be faithful – the task of the Holy See – is to see in one world of many tongues and cultures the one faith proclaimed in accord with the Gospel witness of the past and in one voice with the living church throughout the world. As I have pointed out twice publicly in the past two weeks, those with worldwide responsibilities in Rome do want to work with us expeditiously in publishing a new lectionary, collaborating in the task of treating the tradition faithfully – and in the language which our people speak today. The decision of the Congregation f