

# Cardinal Mahony and the Media



Pope John Paul II addresses entertainment and media industry professionals Sept. 16, 1987 in Universal City, an appearance that had a profound effect on many in attendance.

regarded as the most media-savvy person ever to serve in the Chair of Peter.)

Instrumental in forming the Catholics in Media Awards, Cardinal Mahony has often celebrated the Mass prior to the annual awards ceremony. At his last appearance in 2010, he commended the media for using its power to make known vital issues in our world.

It was another example of his efforts to establish and maintain an upbeat and positive relationship with the media in this Media Capital. (The media, it must be noted, has not always repaid that favor, especially in some of its reporting during the clergy abuse scandal.)

Media have dramatically changed since Cardinal Mahony became the leader of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. And as a leader, he has encouraged the archdiocese to use “the new media” in service of its mission. The educational television system throughout the archdiocese, rooted in the 1960s, has become stronger. More recently, archdiocesan departments and ministries have utilized video conferencing capability to better connect people — and to problem-solve — in locations hundreds of miles apart.

The cardinal himself has come a long way from his ham radio days, and today uses emerging and available technology and media in his ministry. Just as importantly, he has pursued his ministry with a positive attitude toward the communications and entertainment media — emblematic of his desire to work collaboratively in addressing challenges and opportunities. ♦

*Capuchin Franciscan Father Tony Scannell has worked in the communications media for nearly 50 years, and has served as executive publisher of The Tidings.*

By Rev. Anthony SCANNELL, OFM CAP.

**D**uring his years as archbishop of Los Angeles, and in a time of incredibly rapid changes in communications technology, Cardinal Roger Mahony developed a unique relationship with the media here in the Entertainment Capital of the world.

Rather than simply criticize films and television and newspapers, he acknowledged and appreciated their power and influence. An early sign of his appreciation was his involvement in gathering media professionals at the Registry Hotel near Universal Studios in September 1987 for an unprecedented meeting with Pope John Paul II. That had a dramatic and inspiring effect on the professionals, Catholic and otherwise; one of the latter, none other than MCA-Universal chief

Lev Wasserman, soon became a staunch supporter of the Catholic Education Foundation.

Five years after the papal visit Cardinal Mahony published his acclaimed Pastoral Letter, “*Film Makers, Film Viewers: Their Challenges and Opportunities*” (September 1992). Referring to television and cinema as the new ways to tell our stories, he wrote, “These two developments have profound significance for all those who care about the dignity of the human person and the well-being of the human family.”

The 40-page document covered Television News, TV as Entertainment, Art and Religion, Enrichment and Entertainment, Freedom and Responsibility, and offered extensive criteria for evaluating film and television. This assessment of Catholics’ relationship with the entertainment industry — a relationship that at times, and in some

quarters, can be described as tumultuous and even antagonistic — was well-received by critics and filmmakers.

“With understanding, wisdom, and insight,” wrote one, “he also offers pastoral suggestions for parents and those engaged in ministry.”

Noting that the cardinal had consistently refused to boycott media because of content (the “solution” advocated by some Catholics), another reviewer commented, “In his letter, he makes it clear he is not calling for censorship, but rather for a sort of ‘examination of conscience’ for both creators and viewers of entertainment.”

Appointed to the Vatican’s Commission on Social Media, he shared his influence worldwide through the members of that body. (It is worth noting that his appointment as archbishop of Los Angeles and elevation to the College of Cardinals was made by a pope



Cardinal Roger Mahony talks with CBS’ Mike Wallace at the Religious Education Congress in February 1995. Wallace’s “60 Minutes” report on the vibrant Church of Los Angeles aired the following April.



With St. Peter’s Square as a backdrop, Cardinal Mahony is interviewed by KTLA-TV reporter Stan Chambers during the papal conclave in April 2005. The cardinal has addressed local, world and church issues in a variety of media forums over his years as archbishop of Los Angeles.



In recent years, Cardinal Mahony has engaged in online chats during the Religious Education Congress. Few among the church hierarchy have embraced communications technology as readily, or as skillfully, as the archbishop of Los Angeles.

LOS ANGELES POOL PHOTO

DOWNA THOMPSON

TODD TAMBERG

MIKE NELSON