



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMIES**

Monday, 3 November 1997

*Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Members of the Pontifical Academies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. I am especially pleased to meet you on the occasion of the second public session of the Pontifical Academies. I thank Cardinal Paul Poupard, President of the Co-ordinating Council of the Pontifical Academies, who on behalf of you all wished to explain the objectives, aims and goals that you have set for yourselves in view of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. I greet the Cardinals, my venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, the ambassadors to the Holy See, the priests, the religious and all the members of the various Pontifical Academies.

We met for the first time 12 months ago in this same place to celebrate the reform of the Pontifical Academies and to give new impetus to the Holy See's cultural institutions. In that way public recognition was accorded to the scientific and artistic work carried out by your Pontifical Academies in service to the new evangelization in the various fields of culture and art, theology and apostolic action.

2. The plan for your academic work, even in the variety of disciplines that you so competently represent, seeks to be a special "*contribution to Christian humanism at the dawn of the third millennium*". As I express my appreciation for this interesting and ever timely programme, I urge you *to continue courageously* on this path so that your contribution to a more precise, extensive and deeper understanding of Christian humanism may help the cause of the human person and the recognition of his specific value and inalienable dignity.

The variety of contemporary cultures increasingly reveals the challenge that the Church is called to meet inasmuch as she has the precise duty of "reading the signs of the time and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel.... In language intelligible to every generation, she should be able to answer the ever recurring questions which men ask about the meaning of this present life and of the life to come, and how one is related to the other" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 4).

Christians must be able to present the truth about man, as revealed by Jesus Christ, "the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6) and the "first-born among many brethren" (Rom 8:29), because in him alone shines the full dignity of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gn 1:26).

3. I am grateful to the representative of the Pontifical Roman Academy of St Thomas Aquinas and the Catholic Religion and to that of the Roman Theological Academy for their wise reflections on the outlines of Christian humanism, inspired by Aquinas' thought. It is to the Angelic Doctor's outstanding teaching that one can fittingly refer to delineate the authentic humanism that can recognize and give suitable expression to all the dimensions of the human person.

In the present cultural context, often marked by uncertainties and doubts that stifle basic spiritual values, Christian humanism — perennial in its substance but always new in its approach and its presentation — offers an effective answer to the thirst for values and for a truly human life which burns in the soul of every person concerned about his destiny.

4. The activity of the Pontifical Academies is closely linked to the mission of the Successor of Peter. While I confirm your generous commitment, I hope that, through the studies, publications and artistic works you produce and promote, people of all cultures may discover authentic humanism, the true mirror revealing the face of God and the face of man.

I also hope that, under the influence of your example and the seriousness of your academic work, philosophical and theological research and the teaching of these disciplines will be imbued with new enthusiasm, so that human reason, enlightened by divine Revelation, can discover new ways of expressing in the language of the various cultures "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph 3:8).

Many of our contemporaries, especially young people, are disappointed because the alluring promises that marked the second half of the 20th century have often proved utopian, incapable of lifting man from his existential anxieties. There are many who today feel that they are walking down a blind alley. It is the task of Christians, particularly you members of the Pontifical Academies, to spread the knowledge of Christian humanism, especially when the truth about man is obscured or denied by intellectual positions which do not respect his specific dignity.

With the humility of disciples and the strength of witnesses, you, distinguished Academicians, have the exalting mission of delving deeper into the philosophical, theological and cultural

patrimony of the Church, to share it with those who are searching for a satisfying answer.

5. And now, in response to the recommendation of the Co-ordinating Council I am pleased to award the Pontifical Academies Prize to the *Pontifical Institute "Regina Mundi"*, which offers university courses in Rome for the philosophical, theological, spiritual and pastoral formation of women religious from every part of the world. The Pontifical Institute presented the works of three women religious: *Eufrasie Beya Malumbi*, from the Congo, who translated into contemporary language with the cultural categories of her own country some significant aspects of St Thomas Aquinas' theology of salvation; *Cecilia Phan Thi Tien*, from Viêt Nam, who studied the evangelizing power of song, with special reference to the music of her land; and *Marie Monique Rungruang-Kanokkul*, from Thailand, who made a pastoral-theological study of preparation for the sacrament of the Eucharist for the children of mixed marriages in her region.

In awarding this prize I also wish to express my appreciation to the Reverend President, Mother Fernanda Barbiero, and to the teachers of the "Regina Mundi" Institute for the work carried out to promote Christian humanism in the many cultures to which the student religious belong.

I entrust all those present and their mission to Mary most holy, Seat of Wisdom, and I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, to your families and to all your loved ones.

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