



# The Holy See

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## **MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER TO THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR CULTURE ON THE OCCASION OF THEIR PLENARY ASSEMBLY**

*Your Eminences,*

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,*

*Dear Friends,*

1. I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of the plenary assembly of the Pontifical Council for Culture, and I am delighted with the theme you have chosen for this session: For a new Christian humanism on the threshold of the new millennium, an essential theme for humanity's future, for it invites an awareness that the human person holds a central place in the various spheres of society. Moreover, anthropological research is a necessary dimension of all pastoral care and an indispensable condition for a profound evangelization. I thank Cardinal Paul Poupard for his kind words expressing your sentiments.

2. A few weeks before the opening of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, a time of exceptional grace, the mission of proclaiming Christ becomes more urgent; many of our contemporaries, especially young people, are overwhelmed and disoriented by the multiplicity of ideas about the human person, about life and death, about the world and its meaning, and have great difficulty in perceiving who they truly are.

Too often the ideas about man conveyed by modern society have become real systems of thought that have a tendency to deviate from the truth and to exclude God, believing that this is the way to assert man's primacy in the name of his alleged freedom and his full, free development; by so doing, these ideologies deprive man of his constitutive dimension as a person created in the image and likeness of God. Today this profound distortion is becoming a real threat to human beings, for it leads them to consider the human person without any reference to transcendence. It is an essential task for the Church in her dialogue with cultures to lead our contemporaries to discover a sound anthropology, so that they can know Christ, true God and true man. I would be grateful to you for helping the local Churches, through your reflections, to meet this challenge, "to renew from within and transform in the light of Revelation the visions of men and society that shape cultures", as the recent document published by the Pontifical Council for Culture stresses (*Towards a Pastoral Approach to Culture*, n. 25). The risen Christ is Good News for all people, because he has "the power to get to the core of

every culture and to purify it, to make it fruitful, to enrich it and to make it blossom like the boundless love of Christ" (ibid., n. 3). This is how to create and develop a Christian anthropology for our times which can be the basis of a culture, as our ancestors did (cf. Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, n. 59), an anthropology which must take into account the riches and values of contemporary human cultures and imbue them with Christian values. Has not the diversity of the Churches of East and West testified from the beginning to a fruitful inculturation of philosophy, theology, liturgy, juridical traditions and artistic creations? Just as in the early centuries of the Church, philosophy, with St Justin, turned to Christ, for Christianity is "the only sure and beneficial philosophy" (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 8, 1), in the same way it is our duty to offer a Christian philosophy and anthropology today which will prepare the way to the discovery of the greatness and beauty of Christ, the Word of God. And certainly, the attraction of the beautiful, of the aesthetic, will bring our contemporaries to ethics, that is, to leading a happy and worthy life.

3. Christian humanism can be offered to every culture; it reveals man to himself in the knowledge of his own value, gives him access to the very source of his existence, the Father Creator, and to living his filial identity in the Only Son, "first-born of all creation" (*Col* 1: 15), with a heart expanded by the breath of his Spirit of love. "With the richness of the salvation wrought by Christ, the walls separating the different cultures collapsed" (Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, n. 70). The folly of the Cross, of which St Paul speaks (cf. *1 Cor* 1: 18), is a wisdom and power that surpass all cultural boundaries and can be taught to all nations.

Christian humanism can integrate the best achievements of science and technology for man's greatest happiness. It also wards off threats to his dignity as a person who is the subject of rights and duties, and to his very life, so seriously challenged today from conception to the natural end of his days on earth. For if man leads a human life thanks to culture, there is no truly human culture that is not of man, through man and for man, that is, for every individual and for all men and women. The most genuine humanism is revealed to us by the Bible in God's plan of love for man, a design which became even more wonderful through the Redeemer. "In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear" (Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Gaudium et spes*, n. 22).

The multiplicity of anthropological approaches, which is a treasure for all humanity, can also give rise to scepticism and religious indifference; this is a challenge that should be faced with intelligence and courage. The Church does not fear legitimate diversity, which reveals the wealth of the human soul. On the contrary, she relies on this diversity to inculturate the Gospel message. I have been able to see this during my various journeys on all the continents.

4. A few weeks before the opening of the Holy Door, the symbol of Christ whose open heart is ready to welcome into his Church all men and women of all cultures, I fervently hope that the *Pontifical Council for Culture* will continue its efforts, research and programmes, especially by supporting the local Churches and encouraging the discovery of the Lord of history by those who are immersed in relativism and indifference, the new faces of unbelief. It will be a way of giving these people the hope they need to build their personal lives, to take part in constructing society and to turn to Christ, the Alpha and Omega. I invite you in particular to support all those Christian communities which do not always have the means, so that they can pay new attention to the highly diversified world of young people and their teachers, of scientists and researchers, of artists, poets, writers and all who are involved in cultural life; in this way the Church can face the great challenges of contemporary culture. This is just as true in the West as in mission lands.

I would again like to express my gratitude to you for your work, and as I entrust you to the intercession of the Virgin Mary who gave her "yes" to God without reserve, and to the great doctors of the Church, I willingly impart to you and to all your loved ones a special Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of my confidence and esteem.

*From the Vatican, 19 November 1999.*

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