



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE ÉCOLE FRANÇAISE**

Monday, 9 November 1998

Your Eminence,

Dear Friends of the École Française,

According to tradition you come regularly to meet the Successor of Peter, in keeping with your over 100-year-old institution's bond with Holy See. I am pleased to receive you and I thank Mr André Vauchez, Director of the École Française, for his cordial wishes on your behalf.

Your visit is particularly important during these days when you have organized a symposium on the end of the Middle Ages entitled: *Suppliques et requêtes. Le gouvernement par la grâce en Occident*. You have also just published three new volumes by Mr Charles Pietri, *Christiana Respublica*. This also gives me the opportunity to pay homage to the memory of the man whose well-known works are unforgettable, who was a director of the École Française, as has just been recalled, and, at the same time, a member of the *Pontifical Council for Culture*. In his research he combined cultural activity in civil society with service to the Church. Among the eminent members who have worked at the École Française, I cannot forget Mons. Louis Duchesne, who profoundly renewed the study of Christianity in the first centuries.

The École Française is part of the Roman cultural scene and its publications are its principal ambassadors among researchers and the wider public, in the desire to spread French culture, according to the approach that governed its creation and continues to guide its activities. I am pleased with the fruitful relations your institution maintains with the *Pontifical Council for Culture*, with the *Vatican Archives* and with the *Vatican Library*, as well as with the other organizations mentioned previously by Mr Vauchez. The joint organization of symposia is a tangible sign of the fruitful collaboration between the Holy See and one of France's important study centres. "From the time the Gospel was first preached, the Church has known the process of encounter and engagement with cultures" (Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, n. 70). The various forms that a culture takes are the essential expressions of man's humanity and of his search for the meaning of life. They bring out the spiritual dimension of man and his life, as well as his desire to enter into relationship

with God. In rereading history, we never cease to discover the extent to which the Christian faith has inspired cultural production over the past two millenniums, a sign that it inwardly motivates the development of individuals and peoples. Human achievements in turn play a part in evangelization, expressing in symbolic form the Christian mystery, certain aspects of which everyone can then grasp and learn, to encourage their adherence to the person of the Saviour and to increase their faith. In their own way, all forms of culture connected with Christianity contribute to bridging the gap which separates the Gospel from cultures, which, as Paul VI underscored, is one of the greatest tragedies of our time (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 20).

To preserve the memory of our rich heritage as it is engraved in the many vestiges we possess, particularly in Rome, is a service to humanity and a present-day task in order to forge new bonds between faith and cultures: thus by rediscovering in our history the values lived by past generations we will be able to live them in turn and advance towards our meeting with the Lord.

With the hope that you will continue with your fruitful research, I entrust you to the intercession of Our Lady, and impart my Apostolic Blessing to you all.

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