



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER  
POPE JOHN PAUL II  
TO CONFERENCE SPONSORED BY COUNCILS  
FOR CULTURE AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS**

*Thursday, 19 November 1998*

*Your Eminence,*

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,*

*Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of the International Study Conference dedicated to the theme: "*Art, life and representation in cinema: Aesthetic sense, spiritual needs and cultural roles*". I extend my cordial welcome to each of you.

I greet and thank Cardinal Paul Poupard in particular for his kind words on your behalf. I also express my appreciation to the members of the Pontifical Council for Culture and the Pontifical Council for Social Communications who, in collaboration with the Ente dello Spettacolo, have gathered scholars and cinema lovers, continuing an interesting project which already had positive results last year. These intensive days have given you an opportunity to reflect, with the help of experts, directors, screenwriters, art critics and specialists in communications technology, on the language of cinema, which is frequently raised to the level of a true and proper art form, and which the Church regards with increasing attention and interest.

I am pleased that, in order to address these subjects and to respond suitably to the challenges of contemporary culture, you have combined your dicasteries' resources and areas of competence to make a significant joint contribution to the common effort of evangelization, especially in view of the next millennium. To the promoters and organizers, to the speakers and participants, as well as to those who are involved in culture, the cinema, communications and the arts, I extend my best wishes for productive work.

2. Last year, when I received the participants in the conference on "*The cinema, a vehicle of spirituality and culture*", I

stressed that this modern form of communication and culture — if it is well conceived, produced and distributed — can “contribute to the growth of a true humanism”. I am glad to see that, continuing in this vein, your meeting this year is dedicated to the cinema and the value of life.

In these days you have paused to reflect on the cinema as a medium suited to the defence of human dignity and the value of life. In this regard, the exhortation “*Communicating Life*”, which the Italian Bishops addressed to believers and to all people of good will for their 20th Pro-Life Day, is all the more timely. It was proposed in the “*Christian-oriented Cultural Project*”, which the ecclesial community is studying on the threshold of the third millennium. In this project, the cinema’s contribution cannot be missing; indeed, it plays a leading role, since it is the meeting point between the world of the mass media and other cultural forms. Let us think of how negative or positive an influence the cinema can have on public opinion and consciences, especially those of young people. Human life has its own sacredness, which should always be defended and promoted. It is a sublime gift of God. Here is a challenge that must be taken up responsibly by everyone: to make the cinema an appropriate vehicle for expressing the value of life, with respect for the dignity of the person.

3. The cinema can offer and accomplish much in this regard, as the three films you have chosen for your meeting eloquently attest. From its birth, the big screen — as Cardinal Poupard has just mentioned — is the mirror of the human soul in its constant search for God, often unknowingly. With special effects and remarkable images, it can explore the human universe in depth. It is able to depict life and its mystery in images. And when it reaches the heights of poetry, unifying and harmonizing various art forms — from literature to scenic portrayal, to music and acting — it can become a source of inner wonder and pro-found meditation.

This is why the creative freedom of the author, facilitated by the latest technical means, is called today to be a vehicle for communicating a positive message which makes constant reference to truth, to God and to human dignity.

Culture and its fields of study, social communications and their vast, complex implications, the arts and their fascination which enrich life and open it to the beauty and truth of God, are the centre of the Church’s mission, for she has at heart man’s constitutive and vital relationship with God, his relations with his fellow men and women and with the whole of creation.

Therefore, the Church views the cinema as a distinctive artistic expression of the Year 2000 and encourages its pedagogical, cultural and pastoral role. Creativity and technical progress, intelligence and reflection, fantasy and reality, dreams and sentiments come together in film sequences. The cinema is a fascinating instrument for transmitting the perennial message of life and describing its extraordinary marvels. At the same time, it can become a forceful and effective language for condemning violence and the abuse of power. Thus it teaches and denounces, preserves the memory of the past, becomes the living conscience of the present and encourages the quest for a better future.

4. Cinematography, however, must never dominate man and life by subordinating them to artistic creation. Scientific progress has opened to the cinema horizons unhop-ed-for until a short time ago, enabling images to surpass, both in good and evil, the other products of human invention and to capture the audience’s attention and wonder. At the same time, tempted to become an end in itself, the cinema has sometimes ended up losing contact with reality and the positive values of life. How frequently its images destroy the human being, defiling and obliterating his humanity, becoming a

vehicle of degradation instead of growth!

No one knows this better than you: the cinema cannot fully express itself without a clear and constant reference to the moral values and goals for which it came into being. It is up to those who work in this field, using their skill and experience, to explore the cinema's positive meaning, helping set designers, producers and actors to become, by their talent and imagination, heralds of civilization and peace, of hope and solidarity; in a word, heralds of authentic humanity.

I sincerely hope that those who work in the film industry will feel they have a great duty to promote an authentic humanism. I invite Christians take responsibility for working with them in this vast artistic and professional undertaking to defend and promote the true values of human life. This is a valuable service which they render to the task of the new evangelization in view of the third millennium.

To this end, I invoke upon you and your work an abundance of the Holy Spirit's gifts. And as a sign of my esteem and affection, I am pleased to impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you present here, as well as to your co-workers and families.

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