



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO A GROUP OF PILGRIMS FROM Zadar, Croatia***

Friday, 31 January 1997

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of the celebrations for the sixth centenary of the former General Studium of the Dominicans in Zadar. I extend a special thought to Archbishop Ivan Prendjar of Zadar, thanking him for the cordial words he wished to address to me. Then, I greet his predecessor, Archbishop Marijan Oblak, the representatives of the Order of Preachers, the president of the County of Zadar-Knin, the mayor and the city authorities, as well as the dean, the teachers and students of the Arts Faculty of Zadar.

The history of the Dominican General Studium in your Archdiocese, even if it occurred a long time ago, is an important message for today's Christians, called to deal with changed cultural situations that are often so distant from the Gospel.

It is a history that especially testifies to the Catholic Church's efforts to promote culture: the foundation, in 1396, of this prestigious academic centre is just one aspect of the broader dialogue between science and faith, which has produced splendid fruits that even now can be clearly seen in the spiritual patrimony of many peoples.

For over four centuries, the General Studium of the Dominicans was a flourishing place for scholarly research and inculturation of the faith, open to the clergy and laity of various European countries. Unfortunately, at the beginning of the 19th century, the academic institution ceased its beneficial function. Thus, in the name of a false concept of freedom, a significant expression of a cultural commitment inspired by Christianity was brought to a violent end.

2. The presence of a General Studium in Zadar, at the dawn of the modern era, was also part of a vast, organized activity of the Dioceses and religious orders for the evangelization and the moral and civil education of the Croatian people. Through schools and various parish centres, the Church made a decisive contribution to the cultural progress of your people, while also promoting their involvement in the wider scene of European culture.

This beneficial ecclesial commitment has suffered a sad decline in recent decades, due to the predominance of Marxist ideology and the subsequent war that recently caused much bloodshed in Croatia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina. After these events, which caused serious material and moral devastation, today the sociopolitical situation offers new possibilities for the Catholic Church's commitment to human advancement in your homeland.

The ecclesial community is preparing for this by first of all carrying out the mission of evangelization entrusted to it by the Lord. Although not identified with any particular culture, the Gospel message penetrates particular historical and anthropological contexts, and while respecting their values and riches, it helps them "to bring forth from their own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thoughts" (*Catechesi tradendae*, n. 53). In fact, evangelization consists in "affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgement, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation" (*Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 19) in order to promote conditions of life that are increasingly worthy of man and his supernatural destiny.

3. Dear brothers and sisters, the sixth centenary of the foundation of the General Studium of the Dominicans in Zadar calls Croatian Catholics to a strong presence in academic centres to support the necessary dialogue between science and faith. It is a commitment that for believers implies a renewed responsibility towards their culture and their development. From long familiarity with the Gospel may they learn how to purify their various cultural expressions from perspectives of death and from false values, in order to rediscover the authentic human vocation, according to the original plan of the Creator.

At a time marked by profound and rapid change, Catholics are called to offer their country new intellectual and moral energy to build a future inspired by the civilization of love. May honesty in every area of social life, willingness to mutually forgive one another and to seek reconciliation, acceptance of the weak and support for the poor, respect for the person and his dignity, attention to the authentic needs of the family, the primary cell of every society, be inescapable reference points on the journey towards the new Christian millennium.

4. Looking at the great achievements of the past, believers must feel called to give a new vitality to Croatian culture and to promote its authentic values, transmitted by the Fathers. This heritage, if fully assimilated, will be the best guarantee for achieving a modern educational system and for

pursuing further goals of civilization and progress.

I entrust this undertaking to the heavenly intercession of Mary, the Mother of the Redeemer, invoked by you as the “Advocata fidelissima Croatiae”. In wishing every good for your beloved nation, I impart to each one of you and to your families a special Apostolic Blessing.

Praised be Jesus and Mary!

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