



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE PRE-SYNODAL SYMPOSIUM
ORGANIZED BY THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR CULTURE**

Thursday, 14 January 1999

Your Eminence,

Dear Friends,

1. It is a joy for me to receive you as you come to the end of the Pre-Synodal Symposium on the theme: *Christ, source of a new culture for Europe, on the threshold of the third millennium*. I thank Cardinal Paul Poupard, President of the *Pontifical Council for Culture*, and his staff for competently organizing this symposium and enabling the representatives of different disciplines to show the cultural and spiritual wealth of Europe.

2. The history of Europe has been linked to Christianity for two millennia. It can even be said that a cultural renewal came from contemplation of the mystery of Christianity, which makes it possible to take a deeper look at nature and human destiny, as well as at creation as a whole. Although not all Europeans consider themselves Christian, the peoples of this continent have been deeply marked by the Gospel, without which it would be very difficult to speak of Europe. It is in this Christian culture, which constitutes our common roots, that we find the values to guide our thoughts, plans and actions. During your meeting you have made your different tones of voice heard, as in a truly harmonious choir, strengthened by a rich and painful history, but all inspired by the same basic theme: *Christ, source of a new culture for Europe, on the threshold of the new millennium*.

3. Today you are witnesses of the cultural changes which throughout this century have shaken the very foundations of Europe, and of the desire to reflect on the meaning of existence, legitimately shown by our contemporaries. The encounter between cultures and faith is a requirement of our search for truth. It "has created something new. When they are deeply rooted in experience, cultures set forth the human being's characteristic openness to the universal and the transcendent" (Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, n. 70). Thus people will find both help and support in seeking truth, so that, with the gift of grace, they can meet the One who is their Creator and Saviour. And "in reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear. Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery

of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling.... Such is the nature and the greatness of the mystery of man as enlightened for the faithful by the Christian revelation" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 22). Christ reveals man to himself in his fullness as a child of God, in his inalienable dignity as a person, in the greatness of his intellect, which can attain truth, and of his will, which can act rightly. It is through an absolutely indispensable dialogue with persons of all cultures and races that the Church hopes to proclaim the Gospel (cf. *Address to the Pontifical Council for Culture*, 18 January 1983, n. 6).

4. Borders between countries have opened; new barriers must not be erected between human beings, nor new hostilities between peoples arise because of ideologies. The search for truth must be the driving force of every cultural approach and of fraternal relations everywhere within the continent. This presupposes full respect for the human person and for his or her rights, starting with freedom of speech and religion. In order to achieve this, it is important to give our contemporaries a true education based on the essential spiritual, moral and civic values. In this way every individual will become aware of his specific calling and his unique place in the human community, at the service of his brothers and sisters. This prospect is worthy of inspiring people's support and responding to the expectation of young people, who are called to acknowledge the Saviour and to build the city of the future in fraternal charity.

5. If for every human being there is nothing more personal than his faith, it is nevertheless not a merely private phenomenon. Down the centuries, faith in Christ and the spiritual life of men and women have left their mark on the various expressions of culture. Today the Church hopes to pursue and encourage this process, which indirectly opens man to a blessed eternity, restores true hope to him and contributes to the unity of individuals and nations.

In a world with many problems, Christ's message opens an endless horizon and brings incomparable energy, light for the mind, strength for the will, love for the heart. Thus, through your mission you are called to restore to our time a taste for seeking what is beautiful, good, right and true, as well as a taste for the Gospel, in order to develop a sound anthropology and a real knowledge of the faith we need at this moment. In your own way and according to your own vocation, you will contribute to a renewed evangelization and to a new cultural springtime in Europe, which will radiate to all the continents.

6. At the end of our meeting, I would like to thank you for having made your contribution to the Church's reflection on the threshold of the third millennium, in view of the forthcoming Special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops, so that a new impetus can be given to evangelization. As I commend you to the intercession of the saints who shared in Europe's human and cultural development, I cordially grant you my Apostolic Blessing.