



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR CULTURE**

Saturday, 13 March 2004

Your Eminences,

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and Dear Members of the Pontifical Council for Culture,

1. At the end of your Plenary Assembly dedicated to reflection on *"The Christian faith at the dawn of the new millennium and the challenge of non-belief and religious indifference"*, I greet you with joy. I thank Cardinal Poupard for his words. The challenge you have focused on is an essential concern of the Church on all the continents.

2. In communication with the local Churches, you are mapping out a new geography of non-belief and religious indifference across the world, noting an interruption in the process of the transmission of the Christian faith and values. At the same time, we perceive the search for meaning by our contemporaries, witnessed to through cultural phenomena especially in the new religious movements with a strong presence in South America, Africa and Asia: the desire of all men and women to understand the deep meaning of their lives, to respond to the fundamental questions on the origin and the end of life and to journey towards the happiness to which they aspire. Over and above the crises of civilizations and the forms of philosophical and moral relativism, it is up to Pastors and faithful to identify and examine the essential questions and aspirations of our contemporaries, to enter into dialogue with individuals and peoples, and to find original and inculturated ways of presenting the Gospel message and the person of Christ the Redeemer. Culture and art have a wealth of resources to draw from in order to pass on the Christian message. To convey it, however, they require knowledge so that it can be interpreted and understood.

At a time when the great Europe is rediscovering strong ties, it is important to uphold the world of culture, arts and letters, so that it may contribute to building a society that is not founded on materialism but on moral and spiritual values.

3. The spread of ideologies in various social sectors demands a new intellectual thrust from Christians in order to propose strong reflections that will reveal to the younger generations the truth about man and God, and will invite them to acquire an ever more refined knowledge of the faith. It is by means of philosophical and catechetical formation that the young will be able to discern the truth. A serious rational process is a bulwark against all that has to do with ideologies. It develops the taste to penetrate ever deeper so that philosophy and reason may be open to Christ. This is what happened in all periods of the Church's history, and particularly in the Patristic period when the newborn Christian culture was able to enter into dialogue with other cultures, especially Latin and Greek. Such a reflection will also become an invitation to move from a rational to a spiritual approach, to arrive at a personal encounter with Christ and to build up the inner being.

4. It is up to you, therefore, to discern the great cultural changes and their positive aspects, so as to help Pastors find appropriate responses to them and to open men and women to the newness of Christ's Word. At the end of our encounter, I express my gratitude to you for your collaboration and, as I entrust you to the Virgin Mary, I impart an affectionate Apostolic Blessing to you all.