



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE 6th ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
OF THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE
FOR RESEARCH ON THE FACE OF CHRIST**

*To my Dear Brother Cardinal Fiorenzo Angelini,
President emeritus of the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care*

1. The celebration in Rome of the Sixth Annual Conference of the International Institute for Research on the Face of Christ, gives me the chance to extend my cordial greetings to you, Your Eminence, and to express my heartfelt pleasure at the contribution which the Conference will certainly make to the study of this important topic. In collaboration with the Benedictine Congregation of the Reparation Sisters of the Holy Face of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and, with exemplary perseverance and growing enthusiasm, you continue to invite renowned academics from every part of the world, enriched by the most varied cultural preparation to study this relevant theme of evangelization more profoundly. Indeed, "the Kingdom of God is not a concept, a doctrine, or a programme subject to free interpretation, but is before all else a Person with the Face and name of Jesus of Nazareth, the image of the invisible God" (Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, n. 18).

I want to express my grateful appreciation to you, dear Cardinal, for having chosen as this year's theme of study on the doctrine, spirituality and devotion to the Holy Face of Christ, my own teaching and pastoral ministry in this field: a teaching and ministry which have emphasized the special reference to the Person of Christ from my first Encyclical *Redemptor hominis* (4 March 1979) through my most recent documents.

At the conclusion of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 I affirmed: "And is it not the Church's task to reflect the light of Christ in every historical period, to make his Face shine also before the generations of the new millennium? Our witness, however, would be hopelessly inadequate if we ourselves had not first contemplated his face" (Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*, 6 January

2001, n. 16).

2. In enthusiastically encouraging the contribution of many renowned academics, researchers, theologians, writers and artists to the study of the Face of Christ, the International Institute for Research makes a significant and authoritative contribution to the presentation of the human and divine figure of Christ, contributing to the growth in understanding on the level of theological reflection as well as of pastoral practice.

On the *level of theological reflection*, since "only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man become clear" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 22), the study of the Face of Christ, prefigured in the Psalms and in the Prophets and richly described in the New Testament, becomes the way to an ever deeper Christological and anthropological understanding. Besides, on the *level of pastoral practice*, the Church, teacher of humanity, recognizes in the Face of Christ, suffering and risen, the truest and most profound face of the human person to whom Christ offers redemption and salvation. The contemplation of the Face of Christ, therefore, proposes to us that *lived theology* of the Saints, which is the striking witness of the true following of Jesus and the valid support for an effective Christian catechesis in our time.

Your Eminence, the *ecumenical value* of the contemplation of the Face of Christ cannot be ignored. In the ever more profound study of those holy features, the East and the West meet and complement each other, as one can see from the contributions to the series of Conferences that the International Institute for Research on the Face of Christ have dedicated to this topic.

3. In the hope that this Sixth Conference on the Face of Christ may be fruitful, I ask you, dear Cardinal, to represent my spiritual presence during the work of the Conference and convey my best wishes to the honoured contributors, participants, and those who, in many varied ways, support the activity and the initiatives of this International Institute. In particular, I wish you to convey my loving encouragement to the members of the Benedictine Congregation of the Reparation Sisters of the Holy Face of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who assist you in your diligent activity with praiseworthy devotion.

Entrusting your work, and that of all those taking part in the Conference in various ways, to the heavenly intercession of the Most Holy Virgin, honoured Brother, I send to you all a special, heartfelt Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 19 October 2002.

JOHN PAUL II
