



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO PONTIFICAL ACADEMIES**

Saturday, 7 November 1998

Your Eminences,

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished Members of the Pontifical Academies,

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. This third public session of the Pontifical Academies, convened to highlight their contribution to Christian humanism at the dawn of the third millennium, offers me an opportunity to meet you again. I cordially thank everyone present.

I greet Cardinal Paul Poupard, President of the Co-ordinating Council of the Pontifical Academies, and thank him for his courteous words to me on behalf of you all. I also greet the Cardinals, my Venerable Brother Bishops, the ambassadors, the priests, the consecrated men and women and the distinguished members of the Pontifical Academies. Lastly, I greet Prof. Bruno Cagli, President of the National Academy of St Cecilia, and cordially thank the members of the Academy's Youth Choir, directed by Maestro Martino Faggiani, who are making this meeting even more festive by their masterly performance of well-known musical pieces inspired by the Christian people's love for Blessed Mary.

2. It is to the Virgin Mary that today's solemn session is dedicated: *Mary, Icon and Model of humanity redeemed by Christ.*

The attention given to her is also fostered by the theological contributions offered by the distinguished speakers on various aspects of her role in salvation history. In fact, the reflection on man developed over the centuries in various cultures has experienced extraordinary growth from contact with the mystery of Jesus, the Word of God made flesh in Mary's womb. The eminent role of the Virgin Mother of God stands out against the new horizon of knowledge disclosed by Revelation.

In his Letter to the Galatians, St Paul writes: “When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4:4-5). The Apostle’s words take us to the very heart of history: “when the time had fully come”, the Son of God was born of a woman, Mary of Nazareth, who uniquely shared in the mystery of the Word by giving birth in time to the Son begotten by the Father from all eternity.

Mary is a daughter of the chosen people, and for this very reason she is a daughter of their culture, enriched by its millenary contact with the Word of God: she the Woman who actively shared in Jesus’ first miracle at Cana, when he manifested his glory (cf. Jn 2:1-12), and was present on Golgotha to be designated as the Mother of the beloved disciple and our Mother.

The Gospels and Christian tradition teach us to see her as the “place” where the Incarnation occurred in history. For 2,000 years, the life of Jesus and the preaching of the Good News of salvation have had a distinctively Marian dimension. The Virgin Mother is close to human hearts in every age and culture, as demonstrated by the masterpieces of human genius that have flourished in every period of history.

3. The Blessed Virgin is presented by the New Testament as an extraordinary woman in her simplicity of life. The Fathers of the Church, masters of spirituality, expressed the faith of the believing community by emphasizing the truths regarding Mary’s remarkable distinction. She is the *Theotokos*, the *Deipara*, the Mother of God, whom the Church honours with a “special cult” (*Lumen gentium*, n. 66).

On the threshold of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, I am pleased to recall the immense wealth of love, devotion and art shown for 2,000 years by the Churches of the East. They honour Blessed Mary, the *Theotokos*, with other splendid titles such as *Panagia*, the All-Holy; *Hyperagionorma*, Holy beyond all bounds; *Platytera*, Wider than the heavens; *Hodegetria*, She who shows the way; *Eleousa*, She who is full of merciful tenderness. The Eastern Marian tradition contemplates, venerates and sings the praises of the Blessed Virgin, whose icons remind everyone that the Mother of God is the chosen image of humanity redeemed by Christ. The Churches of the East thus offer us, in the wealth of their Marian patrimony, not only an ecumenical path but also a model of Christian humanism.

4. As for the West, in order to honour the Mother of God and to emphasize her universal spiritual motherhood, theology, spirituality and art draw on the mysteries of the Holy Trinity and the Incarnate Word. Her union with Christ is the archetype of the union of the Church and of individual believers with the Redeemer. In reflecting on her, the Lord’s disciples very quickly understood that Blessed Mary was the first to be redeemed, the perfect image of Redemption. Bl. John Duns Scotus, poet of the Immaculate Conception, wrote in this regard: “If Christ, then, has reconciled us most perfectly with God, he merited that this most grievous punishment be withheld from someone. This could only be in favour of his Mother” (*Opus Oxoniense*, III, d. 3, q. 1). I am delighted that the Pontifical International Marian Academy and the Pontifical Athenaeum Antonianum have established a chair of Mariological studies named after this great theologian.

Following the Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis cultus* of my revered Predecessor, the Servant of God Paul VI, I wished to stress in the Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* the essential link between Mary and the Church by emphasizing her mission

within the community of believers. In the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem*, I later recalled how Mary enlightens and enriches the Christian humanism inspired by the Gospel, because, in addition to the various aspects of the “new humanity” which is realized in her, she brings out the dignity and “genius” of woman. Chosen by God to fulfil his plan of salvation, Mary helps us understand the mission of woman in the Church’s life and in the preaching of the Gospel.

5. Dear brothers and sisters, accepting the proposal made by the Coordinating Council of the Pontifical Academies, I am pleased now to give the Pontifical Academies Award to Dr Deyanira Flores Gonzales of Costa Rica for her work in Mariology entitled: *La Virgen María al pie de la cruz (Jn 19, 25-27) en Ruperto Deutz*, presented at the Pontifical Theological Faculty Marianum. I am also pleased to give a medal of my Pontificate, as a sign of appreciation, to two new doctors: Dr Marielle Lamy, of France, for her thesis, *Le culte mariale entre doctrine et dévotion: étapes et en-jeux de la controverse de l’Immaculée Conception au Moyen Age (XIIe-XVe siècles)*, presented at the University of Paris X Nanterre, and Fr Johannes Schneider, an Austrian Franciscan, for his thesis, *Virgo Ecclesia facta: la presenza di Maria nel Crocifisso di San Damiano e nell’Officium Passionis di San Francesco d’Assisi*, presented at the Pontifical Athenaeum Antonianum in Rome.

As you know, the Pontifical Academies Award, instituted two years ago, is meant to encourage young university students, artists and institutions to contribute to the growth of religious studies, Christian humanism and its artistic expressions. I particularly hope that a renewed commitment by scholars to Mariological research will be able to highlight the features of a humanism made fruitful by the Spirit of grace, of which Blessed Mary is the Model and Icon.

With these sentiments, I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, to your families and to all your loved ones.

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