



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE EDITORIAL STAFF
OF THE JESUIT JOURNAL "LA CIVILTÀ CATTOLICA"**

Thursday, 22 April 1999

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I am pleased to extend a cordial welcome to you all and to thank you for this visit you have wished to make on the happy occasion of the 150th anniversary of the foundation of *La Civiltà Cattolica*. I would like to join in your thanksgiving to the "Father of lights", from whom "every perfect gift" (Jas 1:17) descends, for the good achieved in this century and a half of service to the Catholic faith and the Holy See.

La Civiltà Cattolica, which today is the oldest journal published in Italy, was desired by my Predecessor, Pope Pius IX of venerable memory, who with the Brief *Gravissimum supremi* of 12 February 1866 provided it with a special statute. He determined that the periodical, meant to defend "the Catholic religion, its doctrine and its rights with every effort and unceasingly", should be edited by a special College of Writers which, appointed by the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, would live and work together in their own house. After Pius IX, the work accomplished by the journal continued to be appreciated and acknowledged by the Roman Pontiffs, who wished once again to approve its statute. Looking back over the long journey it has made, we can indeed say, as I recalled at the audience granted to your College on 5 April 1982, that *La Civiltà Cattolica* "as an institution has always been placed at the service of the Pope and the Apostolic See"; "while the men, the events and the historical situations have changed, your periodical has always remained faithful" (*L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 6 September 1982, p. 11).

2. Reviewing the past 150 years of your journal, we note a great variety of positions due to changing historical circumstances and to the personalities of the individual writers. However, in the broad, complex panorama of religious, social and political events that from 1850 to today have involved the Church and Italy, one constant can always be seen in the volumes of *La Civiltà Cattolica*: the total loyalty, even if sometimes difficult, to the teachings and directives of the Holy See and love and veneration for the person of the Pope. I am certain that, like your predecessors,

you too will continue to make this characteristic a point of honour and the reason for your journal's existence. I am also convinced that the Apostolic See can always find in you skilled and faithful collaborators, especially in the difficult moments which are never absent from the Church's life.

Among the merits of this journal I would like to recall its readiness to welcome the ecclesial renewal begun by the Second Vatican Council, and the commitment to making its history, the questions discussed and its documents known to the general public. Also worthy of note is its effort in subsequent years to study the Council documents in depth so that the doctrine they contain might be better received and Christian life might be renewed, as it desired.

3. In view of the challenges of the present time as well as the new millennium, I would like to urge you today to become spokesmen of the need for a revival of the spirit and the teachings of the Council, particularly themes such as Christology, ecclesiology and the Magisterium of the Church, the role of the laity and the distinctiveness of Christianity in interreligious dialogue, religious freedom, the relationship between cultures and ecumenism, the media of mass communications and their problematic impact on the mentality and behaviour of people today.

This is a vast field of action that calls on you to persevere in your commitment to "contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). The great changes taking place in the contemporary world urgently require a courageous commitment to teach a convinced and adult faith, capable of giving meaning to life, in order to resist the attacks of an often secularized culture and to give convincing answers to those who, while not believing, are searching for God.

This task, which belongs to the entire Church, demands of each of you, members of the Society of Jesus, "established with the principal aim of being especially concerned to defend and propagate the faith" (Julius III, Apostolic Letter *Exposcit debitum* of 21 July 1550, n. 1), an ever more total and courageous commitment "to the teaching of Christian truth" (*ibid.*), in complete fidelity and communion with the Magisterium.

Today the Christian faith is called to confront non-Christian cultures, scientific progress, philosophies characterized by immanentism and agnosticism, by the rejection of metaphysics and by scepticism about the capacity of human reason to attain truth. In the Encyclical *Fides et ratio* I wished to show how this lack of confidence in human reason makes the acceptance of faith very difficult and deprives reason itself of the contribution of Revelation to a deeper knowledge of the mystery of man, of his origins, his spiritual nature and his destiny. In this context, *La Civiltà Cattolica* is called to overcome the separation of faith and modern culture, of faith and moral behaviour, with special attention to the problems raised in the Encyclicals *Veritatis splendor* and *Evangelium vitae*, which constitute essential aspects for gauging the fidelity of believers to the teaching of Jesus, preserved in the authentic Tradition of the Church.

4. How could we not recall that your journal has always followed the social doctrine of the Church

with special care, supporting the Magisterium's efforts to disseminate, study and renew that fundamental means of evangelization? In today's context it is all too clear that social, financial and economic problems are not unrelated to evangelization and the dignity of the human person. Social injustices, the power of money, a global economy without controls can wound the personal dignity of entire peoples and continents and make it ever more harder for the Gospel message to be accepted. I therefore encourage you to continue your praiseworthy commitment to studying and disseminating the Church's social doctrine, which the changes taking place in society and in the world of work make ever more timely and urgent. The Church's role, which you are called to broaden and spread, is to proclaim the "Gospel of love and peace" by promoting justice, the spirit of brotherhood and the knowledge of man's common destiny, essential conditions for building genuine peace among peoples.

5. Dear Father Writers, while treasuring the long and praiseworthy history of *La Civiltà Cattolica*, continue your valuable ecclesial service, in particular and sincere harmony with the Holy See and the Pope, to whom, as members of the Society of Jesus, you are bound by a special vow.

I entrust your daily work to the Blessed Virgin, Mother of the Church and patroness of the Society. May Mary obtain from her Son a profound spirit of faith for each of you. May she enable you to search the events of human history with Gospel wisdom and discern in that history the "signs of the times". May she help you to commit yourselves generously to the task that the Church has entrusted to you through the Roman Pontiffs.

With these wishes and as a pledge of my constant affection, I sincerely impart to the Father Editor, to each of you and to your staff a special Apostolic Blessing.