



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE ENCICLOPEDIA ITALIANA**

Saturday, 31 March 2001

*Your Eminence,
Mr President,
Distinguished Scholars!*

1. I willingly receive today from the management of the prestigious *Enciclopedia Italiana* the powerful work, in a very beautiful format, that was prepared on the occasion of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. The three volumes of the *Enciclopedia dei Papi* are one of the most important cultural fruits of the Jubilee Year. I sincerely thank you for this truly precious gift.

It is an exceptional work, created by no less than 137 collaborators from about 12 different countries, under the direction of eminent experts. With careful scientific discipline and rich, original iconography, the encyclopedia attests to the surprising continuity of the papacy throughout the events of history. At the same time it offers an extensive view of the 2,000 years of Christianity which have just ended. This is pointed out by Cardinal Paul Poupard, President of the Pontifical Council for Culture, in his scholarly introduction. I extend my cordial greeting to him, and thank him for his kind words expressing your common sentiments. I also greet the President of Treccani and all present who are involved in the work in various ways.

This monumental achievement, already considered an indispensable point of reference by scholars, is destined to make a substantial contribution at the dawn of the third millennium not only to the history of the Church, but to culture itself.

2. The papacy has marked humanity's history, beginning with the events of an unknown fisherman of Galilee, Simon son of John, to whom Christ gave the name Peter. I am his humble Successor in 2,000 years of continuity which have not been exempt from harsh trials, to the point of martyrdom.

Peter was first of all a martyr who, by shedding his blood in the capital of the Empire, made Rome the centre of Christianity. This *Enciclopedia dei Papi* introduces the reader to a world that has as its constant reference-point, in accordance with the Lord's will, the Apostle's Successors, in different and, at times, dramatic historical circumstances. Through the succession of so many Pontiffs who differed in origin, culture and lifestyle, the papacy, even while being continuously renewed, has maintained its basic identity in the historical development of its function.

The *Enciclopedia dei Papi* also emphasizes the vital historical relationship that binds the papacy to Italy in a special way, in the fulfilment of a truly universal ministry which is the Catholic one. This bond is clearly shown by the very rich artistic and cultural patrimony preserved by Rome and Italy, as an eloquent witness to the inculturation of the Gospel.

3. May the Lord reward you for offering attentive readers the fruit of a precious work of historical research with methodological rigour, serious scientific analysis and an accurate bibliography. I warmly congratulate you on the long and diligent work of the editors, carried out on the sound basis of historical knowledge and with no apologetic intent. I cordially thank the Institute of the *Enciclopedia Italiana* for this editorial initiative of high cultural value that honours them, and, while I assure you that I will remember you in my prayers, I impart my affectionate Blessing to you all.