



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE SIXTH PUBLIC SESSION
OF THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMIES
OF THEOLOGY AND OF ST THOMAS AQUINAS**

Thursday, 8 November 2001

*Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Illustrious Academicians,
Dear Brothers and Sisters!*

1. I am happy to greet each of you at this public session of the Pontifical Academies at which you wish to renew your fidelity to the Successor of Peter and your commitment to fostering Christian humanism in an era of globalization.

I warmly greet Cardinal Paul Poupard, President of the Coordinating Council for the Pontifical Academies, and I thank him for the kind words he addressed to me in the name of all present. With him, I greet the Cardinals, Bishops, Ambassadors, priests, men and women religious, together with the members of the Interuniversity Choir of Rome, who wanted to enrich our session with the beauty of music.

2. This year the Pontifical Academy of St Thomas Aquinas and the Pontifical Academy of Theology organized the public session on the thought provoking theme: *The cultural dimensions of globalization: a challenge to Christian humanism*. As I have said on several occasions, the cultural and ethical features of globalization are of special interest and greater interest to the Christian community, compared to the purely economic and financial effects of the phenomenon. Christian reflection on globalization can draw useful reflections from the event of Pentecost. St Luke in the Book of Acts narrates that, full of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles "began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" and the numerous crowd, coming from "every nation

under heaven", heard "the mighty works of God" (cf. Acts 2,4-11) announced in the various languages of the world. The Church, sent to the nations to be the "universal sacrament of salvation" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 48), at the beginning of the third millennium (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*) continues to travel the thousand ways of the world to announce the Gospel of Jesus "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (Jn 14,6) everywhere. Teaching all the nations (cf. Mt 28,19), she puts the salt of truth and the fire of charity into the cultures of the world with the newness and the salvation brought by Christ. In her daily mission the Church "speaks every language, understands and embraces all tongues in charity, and thus overcomes the dispersion of Babel" (*Ad gentes*, n. 4).

Expert in humanity, she is called to discern and evaluate the cultural *novum* produced by globalization. It is a *novum* that involves the entire community of men and women, called by God, Creator and Father, to form a single family in which the rights and responsibilities of all are recognized, based on the common and fundamental dignity of the human person.

3. The discernment, which we are called to exercise as disciples of Christ, has for its primary object the inevitable human, cultural and spiritual impact though it also involves the economic and financial aspects of globalization. What is the image of man (that globalization) proposes and even imposes? What culture does it favour? Is there room for the experience of faith and the interior life?

One has the impression that the complex dynamism, caused by the globalization of the economy and the media, eventually tends to reduce the human person to a market variable, to a piece of merchandise, which really makes the person a totally irrelevant factor in the decisive options. Man risks feeling trampled by the faceless globalized mechanisms and increasingly loses his identity and dignity as a person.

In virtue of such a dynamism, cultures also run the risk of being homogenized if they are not accepted and respected in their originality and richness, but forcefully adapted to the needs of the market and fashion. The result is a cultural product, bearing a superficial syncretism, imposing a new scale of values, derived from criteria that are regularly arbitrary, materialistic, consumerist and opposed to any kind of openness to the Transcendent.

4. At the beginning of the new millennium, the great challenge puts at stake the vision of the human person, his destiny and the future of humanity. It also makes imperative a careful and profound intellectual and theological discernment of the anthropological paradigm, produced by rapid shifts in time. In this context the Pontifical Academies can offer a valuable contribution, by orienting the cultural choices of the Christian community and of all society and offering occasions and instruments of dialogue between faith and culture, between revelation and human problems. They are also called to suggest paths of critical knowledge and authentic dialogue, that place man and his dignity at the centre of every project in order to foster his integral growth in society.

We need to conquer fear and address such timely challenges, trusting in the light and strength of the Spirit whom the risen Lord continues to give to his Church. "*Duc in altum!* - Put out into the deep!", I repeated many times in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*. Today I entrust to you this invitation of Christ, so that you may face the many and complex problems of our time with courage and skill, to sustain a humanism in which man can rediscover the joy of being a more living and beautiful image of the Creator.

5. Dear Brothers and Sisters, as you know well, six years ago I instituted the Prize of the Pontifical Academies, in order to raise up new talent and encourage the efforts of young scholars, artists and institutions who dedicate their activity to the promotion of a Christian humanism. Accepting the proposal of the Coordinating Council of the Pontifical Academies, on this solemn occasion I am delighted to give this prize to Dr Pia Francesca de Solenni, for her work in Thomistic theology entitled: *A Hermeneutic of Aquinas's Mens through a Sexually Differentiated Epistemology. Towards an Understanding of Woman as Imago Dei*, presented to the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross.

I also wish to offer, as a sign of appreciation, a medal of the Pontificate to Dr Johannes Nebel, a member of the Spiritual Family "*L'Opera*", who just received his doctorate for his thesis *Die Entwicklung des römischen Messritus in ersten Jahrtausend anhand der Ordines Romani. Eine synoptische Darstellung*, presented at the Pontifical Atheneum of St Anselm in Rome.

At the end of this solemn Assembly, I want to express to all the Academicians, and especially to the Members of the Pontifical Academy of Theology and of St Thomas, my sincere appreciation for the activity carried out and express best wishes for a renewed commitment in philosophy and theology, and in the formation of young scholars.

With these sentiments, I entrust each of you, and your precious work of study and research, to the maternal protection of the Virgin Mary, Seat of Wisdom, and I impart to all a special Apostolic Blessing.