



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
FOR THE EIGHTH PUBLIC MEETING
OF THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMIES**

*To my Venerable Brother Cardinal Paul Poupard
President of the Council for Coordinating the Pontifical Academies*

1. With deep joy I send this Message to the participants in the eighth Public Meeting of the Pontifical Academies. The meeting intends to promote the work of these important cultural institutions and at the same time to give recognition to those who are striving to foster a renewed Christian humanism.

I greet you cordially, Venerable Brother, and I thank you for the concern with which you are following this initiative. I then greet the Presidents of each Academy and their collaborators, as well as the Members of the Roman Curia who have spoken. I extend my greetings to the Authorities, to the Ambassadors and to all who have wished to honour this event with their presence.

2. The theme chosen for today's public session - *The Martyrs and their monumental legacies, living stones in the construction of Europe* - is intended to offer a key to the interpretation of the epochal turning point we in Europe are living. It is a matter of discovering the deep continuity that links the history of the past and the present, the Gospel witness courageously offered in the first centuries of the Christian age by so many men and women and the witness that, in our day too, many of those who believe in Christ are continuing to offer to the world, reasserting the primacy of the Gospel of Christ and of charity.

If we forget the Christians who sacrificed their lives to strengthen the faith, the present time with its projects and ideals would lose a precious element, since the great human and religious values would no longer be comforted by a concrete witness integrated into history.

3. "Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house" (I Pt 2: 4).

The Apostle Peter's words have inspired and sustained thousands of men and women as they faced persecution and martyrdom during the 2,000 years of Christianity. Fortunately, in Europe today - but this is not the case in other regions of the world - persecution is no longer a problem. Christians, however, must often face more or less open forms of hostility and this obliges them to give a clear and courageous witness. With all people of good will, they are called to build a true "common house", which is not merely a political, economic and financial structure, but a "home" full of memories, values and spiritual content. These values have found and continue to find in the Cross an eloquent symbol that sums them up and expresses them.

In the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, I stressed that the European Continent is living in a "time of bewilderment" and that the European Churches are often tempted by "a dimming of hope" (n. 7). Among the disturbing signs of this I pointed out the gradual loss of the Christian heritage, which consequently causes the European culture to slide into a sort of "silent apostasy" in which people live as though God did not exist (n. 9).

4. Disciples of Christ are called to contemplate and imitate the many witnesses of the Christian faith who lived in the last century in the East and in the West, who persevered in their loyalty to the Gospel in situations of hostility and persecution, often to the supreme sacrifice of shedding their blood. These witnesses are a convincing sign of hope that is held up first of all to the Churches of Europe. Indeed, they bring us a witness of the vitality and fruitfulness of the Gospel also in the contemporary world. They are truly a luminous beacon for the Church and for humanity, for they have made Christ's light shine in the darkness.

They strove to serve Christ and his "Gospel of hope" faithfully, and by their martyrdom expressed their faith and their love to a heroic degree, putting themselves generously at the service of their brethren. Thus, they showed that obedience to the law of the Gospel brings forth a moral life and social harmony that honour and promote every person's dignity and freedom.

It is therefore up to us to gather this rare and most precious heritage, this unique and exceptional patrimony, as did the first generations of Christians who built monumental memorials, basilicas and places of pilgrimage over the tombs of the Martyrs to remind everyone of their supreme sacrifice.

5. This solemn Public Session is thus intended as a commemoration and inner acceptance of the Martyrs' witness. Christians today should not forget the roots of their experience of faith and of their civil commitment.

I am therefore pleased to ask you, Your Eminence, to award the Pontifical Academies' Prize for

the year 2003 to Dr Giuseppina Cipriano for her study entitled *I Mausolei dell'Esodo e della Pace nella Necropoli di El-Bagawat. Riflessioni sulle origini del Cristianesimo in Egitto* (The Mausoleums of the Exodus and of Peace in the Necropolis of El-Bagawat: Reflections on the origins of Christianity in Egypt). I likewise ask you to award the Medal of the Pontificate to Dr Sara Tamarri, for her work entitled *L'Iconografia del Leone dal Tardoantico al Medioevo* (The Lion in the Iconography of the Late Antiquity and in the Middle Ages).

At the same time, Venerable Brother, I express my pleasure to the winners for their respective studies that accentuate the value of the archaeological, liturgical and historical patrimony to which the Christian culture is so indebted, and from which it is still possible to draw elements of authentic humanism.

As I assure everyone of my special remembrance in prayer, I gladly impart my Blessing to you, Your Eminence, and to each one of those present.

From the Vatican, 3 November 2003

JOHN PAUL II