



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY  
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO CROATIA (OCTOBER 2-4, 1998)

## **MESSAGE TO THE WORLD OF CULTURE AND LEARNING**

*Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear Brothers and Sisters!*

1. I am happy to have this opportunity to greet you most cordially and respectfully. At this moment, my thoughts go too to your colleagues who in every part of the country are engaged in the noble toil of searching for the truth in the various fields of knowledge. I warmly greet all of them.

In the programme of my Pastoral Visit to your country, I wanted this brief but, for me, most important meeting with you who represent the world of culture and learning. In this way I can reaffirm the respect and appreciation which the Church has for intellectual effort as an expression of the human spirit's creativity. I gladly take this opportunity to pay homage to Croatia's rich cultural tradition, testimony of the Nation's ancient and profound sense of the good, the true and the beautiful.

I avail myself of this occasion to reflect with you on the specific contribution which Christians, as men and women of culture and learning, are called to make to the further growth of a true humanism in your Nation, as part of the great family of peoples. The task of the Christian in fact is to spread the light of the Gospel throughout society, and hence also in the world of culture.

Through the centuries, Christianity has made an important contribution to the formation of the cultural heritage of the Croatian people. On the threshold of the Third Millennium, therefore, there should be no lack of new and vital energies, ready to give fresh impulse to the promotion and development of the cultural heritage of the Nation, in full fidelity to its Christian roots.

2. Like Europe and the rest of the world, Croatia is passing through a time of great change, a time

of exciting perspectives but also of significant problems. It is necessary to respond appropriately to these changes, with a response that comes from a reflection upon the profound truth of man and from the respect due to the moral values which are part of human nature.

In fact, there is no true progress without respect for the ethical dimension of culture, of scholarly research and of all human activity. Today's ethical relativism, obscuring as it does moral values, leads to modes of behaviour which destroy the dignity of the person. This in turn creates serious problems for truly human development in every aspect of life.

It is also clear that the good of the person, which is the ultimate goal of every cultural and scholarly enterprise, can never be sundered from consideration of the common good. In this regard, I recall the inscription found in the Great Council Hall in Dubrovnik: "Obliti privatorum, publica curate". It is my hope that the commitment of thinkers and scholars, inspired by true values, will always be seen as a generous and disinterested service of the human person and of society. It must never be bent to serve ends contrary to this supreme goal.

3. Since culture has as its ultimate objective the service of the true good of the person, it is not surprising that, in seeking cultural progress, society finds the Church at its side. The Church too directs her pastoral care towards "the entire reality of the individual person, in the unity of body and soul, heart and conscience, intellect and will" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 3). The service of the human person is the meeting-point between the Church and the world of learning and culture.

Down the course of the centuries, this meeting has proven to be singularly fruitful. With its treasury of luminous truths about the various aspects of life, the Gospel has very significantly enriched the answers devised by reason, ensuring that they match more exactly the deepest expectations of the human heart.

Despite the misunderstandings which have arisen at different times, the Church has always been very sensitive to the values of culture and scholarly research. This is what we see in your own history: when in the seventh century your ancestors were baptized and entered the Church, they became at the same time part of the world of Western culture. From then onwards, Croatia experienced constant progress in the field of culture and learning, a progress to which the Church gave decisive support. The contribution which the Church has made to philosophy, literature, music, theatre, science, art is universally recognized, as is the merit she warrants for building schools of every kind: from primary schools to great centres of university learning. The Church intends to pursue this policy in the future, since she considers it an integral part of her service of the Gospel message.

In this region, where different world-views have mingled for centuries, there is need of a continuing common commitment in favour of culture, without indulging in sterile contrasts, but affirming instead attitudes of respect and conciliation. This does not mean a renunciation of one's own

identity and culture. The roots, the heritage and the identity of each people, in which there is something genuinely human, represent a great resource for the international community.

4. The climate of freedom and democracy which emerged in Croatia at the start of this decade permits the re-establishment of faculties of theology in Croatian universities. This will greatly contribute to the promotion of dialogue between culture, scholarship and faith. Universities are the privileged place for a dialogue which can work for the good of the new generation, giving young people direction in their moral choices and their active participation in society. May your schools, and above all your universities, be true power-houses of thought, so that they can train men and women to excel in the various fields of learning, but also prepare people deeply aware of the great mission entrusted to them: that of serving the human person.

One result of the dynamic link between faith and reason will surely be the moral and spiritual re-birth of your country, which for many years was subjected to the devastations of atheistic materialism. This new flourishing of values will be the strongest bastion against today's challenges of consumerism and hedonism. Thus, on a sound basis of values, the human person, the family and society as a whole will be able to develop in accordance with the truth, experiencing joy and hope, with a gaze that is turned to the eternal destiny which God has prepared for every human being. Thus will be avoided in the future the drama of the separation between culture and the Gospel, which has so troubled our age (cf. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20).

A culture which rejects God cannot be considered fully human, because it excludes from its vision the One who has created man in his own image and likeness, has redeemed him through the work of Christ, and has consecrated him with the anointing of the Holy Spirit. This is why the human person, and every aspect of the person, must be the focus of culture in all its forms and the reference-point of every scholarly endeavour.

5. God has given you as a heritage a splendid country, whose National Anthem begins with the words: "Our beautiful homeland". The duty to respect nature is unmistakable here, the duty to act with a sense of responsibility for the life-giving resources which Providence has given to humanity. The world is the stage on which each of us is called to play our part to the praise and glory of God the Creator and Saviour.

Thirsting for true wisdom, for knowledge of the universe and of the laws which regulate it, fascinated by the true, the good and the beautiful, seek to explore the Supreme Source of all: God, the origin of every truth, who wisely sustains and governs all that exists! May the Word of God illumine your exploration of the paths which lead to the truth. Nurturing a deep love for truth, you will become in your daily undertakings passionate enquirers and ready collaborators of all who are searching for the truth.

6. A special word finally to the men and women of learning and culture who are professing

Christians: to them is entrusted the task of ceaselessly evangelizing the world in which they work. Their hearts therefore must be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, that “Spirit of truth” who guides us “to the fullness of truth” (cf. *Jn* 16:13).

This lofty task requires constant study of all that is involved in our attachment in faith to Christ, “the true light who enlightens all people” (*Jn* 1:9), “the power and wisdom of God” (1 *Cor* 1:24). For “all things were created through him and for him; he is before all things and in him all things hold together” (*Col* 1:16-17). May each of you assume this lofty task with pride and make every effort to fulfill it with all generosity.

To the protection of the Holy Mother of God, whom the Church invokes as Seat of Wisdom, I entrust all those who search for the truth with sincerity of heart, and upon all of you I invoke the blessings of God.

*From Zagreb, 3 October 1998, the twentieth of my Pontificate*