



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORY INSTITUTES

Friday 26 May 2000

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am pleased to welcome you, the members of the *International Union of the Institutes of Archaeology, History and Art History* in Rome. In particular, I greet your President, Prof. Krzysztof Zaboklicki.

The mission assigned to your international union by its founders is to serve history and art by highlighting the numerous examples that Rome possesses of Western civilization, Christian culture and Church life. It is a precious heritage that has grown over the centuries. Careful to preserve, study and transmit this inheritance left by many peoples, you are the custodians as it were of a priceless treasure from which, like the scribe in the Gospel, you must draw unceasingly from both the old and the new through laborious and hidden work.

You have not hesitated to make available to researchers and students a bibliographical data bank set up under the auspices of the *Roman Union of Scientific Libraries*, together with the Vatican Apostolic Library. I am delighted with this remarkable tool, as well as with the scholarships you offer to young researchers and the international cooperation you foster; all this creates links that transcend borders, cultures and generations; it is also a vehicle of evangelization and peace. The Church recognizes the irreplaceable role of cultural assets for the promotion of an authentic humanism and lasting peace among nations. "Through the universality of culture, peoples, far from competing with or opposing one another, will acquire a taste for complementing one another, each contributing his own gifts and each benefiting from the gifts of all the others" (cf. Pius XII, *Address to the International Committee for the Unity and Universality of Culture*, 14 November 1951). I therefore encourage you to be the tireless leaders of an international solidarity that invites us to believe that human brotherhood is possible in one and the same quest for truth and beauty.

2. The spread of artistic and historical culture to all sectors of society gives our contemporaries the means to find their roots and to draw from them the cultural and spiritual elements for building their personal and community lives. At the areopagus of Athens, did not the Apostle Paul himself show his listeners that art expresses a spiritual searching which spurs man to go beyond material reality (cf. *Acts 17: 19-31*)? Every person and every society has need of a culture which will open them to a sound anthropology and to the moral and spiritual life. Indeed, as the theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar appropriately said, there is a relationship between aesthetics and ethics (cf. *Glory and the Cross*, Introduction). Art invites us to develop the beauty of life while fully living its moral demands and tirelessly seeking the truth.

3. As something gratuitous, art reminds us that man and society cannot be reduced to efficiency at all costs. Cultural assets has the precise function of opening people to the meaning of the mystery and the revelation of the absolute, for they bear a message. For its part, religious art proclaims the divine in its own way and prepares the soul for contemplation of the Christian mysteries, by making understood through symbolic expression what words have great difficulty in expressing and by inviting Trinitarian prayer and devotion to the saints.

I thank you for all the work accomplished by your international union. As I entrust you to the intercession of the *Theotokos*, whose mystery has inspired countless artists, I cordially grant you a special Apostolic Blessing as a sign of my esteem, and I willingly extend it to your families and to all the members of your various institutions.

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