



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE JOHN XXIII INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL CENTRE**

Saturday, 7 April 2001

Dear Students!

1. Welcome to this meeting, which you so desired! I greet you with affection and I thank you for this visit, which permits me to better understand your expectations and hopes as young people from different parts of the world who have come to Rome to study. I greet Mons. Remigio Musaragno, Director of the John XXIII International Cultural Centre, in which he has been active for the last 40 years. In thanking him for the cordial words that he wished to address to me, I extend my best wishes to him that the priestly jubilee he recently celebrated may be an occasion for renewed self-giving to Christ and of ever more generous service to his brethren.

With him I greet the person who interpreted your sentiments and all those who generously cooperate in the life of your community. I think of all the students of the less wealthy nations of the world and the ecclesial communities which look after them. I especially recall, in addition to your worthy centre, those that are represented here today: the Central Office for Foreign Students in Italy (UCSEI) in Rome and in Perugia, and the La Pira International Centre of Florence.

2. You come from 50 countries and you spend an important period of your youth in Rome. This is a precious cultural and formative opportunity, which enriches you with scientific skills and new human experiences, permitting you to prepare to be protagonists who are generous and attentive to the development of your respective nations. It is certainly a unique privilege for you to reside in the Eternal City, the centre of the Catholic Church. Here you can admire important and prestigious traces of ancient Roman civilization, as well as eloquent testimonies of the Christian faith. Here you can open your heart and mind to the knowledge and values of fraternity, of reception and respect for the riches of every people.

In your Centre, where young people of different cultures, races and nations live together, it is possible to obtain a unique and enriching experience of human and spiritual "fellowship". The variety of origins of the residents permits the Centre to be a school of fraternal living, where *the invitation to dialogue among cultures*, which in the Message for this year's World Day of Peace I proposed as a privileged path for the construction of the civilization of love and peace, becomes current and fruitful. Dialogue does indeed lead to acknowledging the richness of diversity, preparing souls for its reciprocal acceptance, in the perspective of an authentic cooperation responding to the original vocation to the unity of the entire human family.

3. Dear students, I would like today to entrust to you, who one day, please God, will be the protagonists of the history of your countries, the task of making the most of these years of formation to grow humanly, culturally and spiritually. Only in this way can you be builders of new societies, where everyone feels accepted as a member of the same family, called to live in solidarity and peace.

In order for this to happen, apart from the essential scientific and professional preparation, you must also give attention to your personal relationship with God. In a world where the dominant interests seem to be material ones, I urge you to seek "first the kingdom of God and his righteousness", because all the rest, as Jesus himself assures us, will be given to you "as well" (cf. Mt 6: 33). Moreover, the experience of faith, in a context of multiculturalism, will help you not to submit to easy standardizations, to cultural models inspired by a secularized and practically atheistic concept of life, as also to forms of radical individualism. It will spur you instead to acquire a more mature relationship with the values of your culture, to enrich them in the comparison with other traditions and to verify them with the experience gained from the encounter with Christ.

4. These, dear young people, are the conditions that can render your Centre a place of hope, a family within which each one respects and loves the other, a training ground for the "civilization of love". Coming from many countries, you can reflect together on the motives which, unfortunately, generate divisions and hate in some of the peoples to whom you belong. Together you can mature in reciprocal knowledge, seeking what unites and overcoming those atavistic contrasts that sometimes humiliate the dignity of man. The experience of welcoming, of mutual understanding and, when necessary, of pardon form a daily training to prepare you for future responsibilities, when you will be asked to be builders of solidarity and peace, healing wounds and recomposing in minds and hearts the positive condition of fraternity.

5. Your house is dedicated to my venerable predecessor, Bl. John XXIII. He was the Pope of dialogue and peace, of goodness and kindness towards all. During his brief but intense pontificate, he began an *aggiornamento* that was able to impress on the Church a vast and meaningful renewal. With the Second Vatican Council, he then prepared the Church for the challenges of the third millennium. In the various roles to which he was called by Providence, he preserved his simple faith and a constant attachment to his popular roots.

I entrust each one of you to the intercession of Bl. John XXIII, who is particularly close to you. May he help you to preserve with fidelity your human and Christian identity, and make you ready to open yourselves courageously to the needs of your brothers. I also invoke on you the maternal protection of Mary, Mother of the Lord, and I bless you together with your hopes, your families, the persons that are dear to you and your countries of origin.