



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO CARDINAL GIANFRANCO RAVASI
PRESIDENT OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR CULTURE
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 15th PUBLIC SESSION
OF THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMIES**

*To my Venerable Brother
Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi
President of the Pontifical Council for Culture*

On the occasion of the 15th Public Session of the Pontifical Academies I am happy to send you my cordial greeting, which I gladly extend to the Presidents and to the other academicians, and in particular to you, Venerable Brother, the President of the Coordinating Council. I also address my greeting to the Cardinals, Bishops, Priests and Men and Women Religious, to the Ambassadors and to all those participating in this annual appointment.

Fifteen years ago Venerable John Paul II instituted the Coordinating Council and the Award of the Pontifical Academies, offering a significant encouragement and a consistent impulse to the development of their activities. Now, carefully evaluating what has been achieved, it is necessary to encourage further the process of renewal of each and every one of the Pontifical Academies, so that they may make an ever more effective contribution to the Apostolic See and the whole Church. I am therefore asking you, Venerable Brother, to take particular care in following the work of each Institution, promoting at the same time a process of mutual support and growing collaboration.

The 15th Public Session has been prepared by the Pontifical International Marian Academy and the Pontifical Academy of the Immaculate Conception, which quite fittingly wanted this solemn gathering to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Proclamation of the Dogma of Mary's Assumption, proposing the theme: "Mary's Assumption, a Sign of Consolation and Sure Hope".

On 1 November 1950, in fact, during a memorable Jubilee Year, Venerable Pius XII, promulgating the Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus*, solemnly proclaimed this Dogma in St Peter's Square. Several years earlier, in 1946, Fr Carl Balić, OFM, founded the International Marian Academy precisely in order to support and coordinate the Assumptionist movement.

In the difficult and delicate moment in history following the end of the Second World War, with that solemn act Pius XII wanted to point to Mary as a model and paradigm of the new humanity redeemed by Christ, not only for Catholics but for all men and women of good will: "And so we may hope", he affirmed, "that those who meditate upon the glorious example Mary offers us may be more and more convinced of the value of a human life... [and that] all may see clearly to what a lofty goal our bodies and souls are destined. Finally it is our hope that belief in Mary's bodily Assumption into Heaven will make our belief in our own resurrection stronger and render it more effective" (*Munificentissimus Deus*: AAS 42, 1950, 753-771). I believe this hope is still valid and I too invite all of you to be guided by Mary in proclaiming and witnessing the hope that flows from contemplation of the Mysteries of Christ, who died and rose for our salvation.

Indeed, as the Second Vatican Council teaches in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, Mary is the sign of sure hope and consolation for the People of God on its pilgrim journey through history: "The Mother of Jesus in the glory which she possesses in body and soul in Heaven is the image and beginning of the Church as it is to be perfected in the world to come. Likewise she shines forth on earth, until the day of the Lord shall come (*cf.* 2 Pt 3:10), a sign of certain hope and comfort to the pilgrim People of God" (n. 68).

In the Encyclical Letter dedicated to Christian Hope, *Spe Salvi*, I could not fail to mention Mary's special role in sustaining and guiding believers on their journey towards their heavenly Homeland. I addressed her, invoking her as the *Star of Hope* for the Church and for all humanity (*cf.* n. 49). Mary is the shining star of light and beauty that announces and anticipates our future, the definitive condition to which God, the Father who is rich in mercy, calls us.

The Fathers and Doctors of the Church, echoing as well the common sentiment of the faithful and reflecting on what the liturgy celebrated, proclaimed this singular privilege of Mary and illustrated the shining beauty that sustains and nourishes our hope.

St John Damascene, who dedicated to Mary's Assumption three magnificent sermons given in Jerusalem in the year 740 near what tradition holds to be the Tomb of Mary, stated: "Indeed, your soul did not descend into the nether world; your flesh did not see corruption. Your immaculate and totally beautiful body did not remain in the earth but, on the contrary, you are seated on a throne in the heavenly kingdom as queen, lady, ruler, Mother of God, the assumed true genitrix of God" (*First Homily on the Dormition*: PG 96, 719).

Among the many voices of the Latin West that resonate with this assertion from the Eastern

Church, there is the voice of St Bernard of Clairvaux, the Cantor of Mary, who evokes the Assumption in these words: “Our Queen has gone before us; she has gone before us and has been received with such great festivity that her servants can confidently follow their lady, saying: *Draw us to yourself. We will run after the odour of your perfume.* (Canticle 1:3). Our pilgrim humanity has sent ahead its Advocate who, being Mother of the Judge and Mother of Mercy, can plead the cause of our salvation with devotion and efficacy. Our earth today has sent to Heaven a precious gift so that, by giving and receiving, the human and divine, the earthly and the heavenly, the lowly and the most high, are united in a fortunate exchange of friendship.... She is the queen of heaven, she is merciful, she is the Mother of the Only-Begotten Son of God” (*Sermon I on the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, PL 183, 415*).

Travelling, therefore, on the *via pulchritudinis* that the Servant of God Paul VI indicated as a fruitful path for theological and Mariological research, I would like to note the profound harmony among theological and mystical thought, the liturgy, Marian devotion and art that, with the splendour of colour and form, sing praise to the mystery of Mary’s Assumption and her heavenly glory at her Son’s side.

Among the latter, I invite you to admire two particularly significant works found in Rome: the apse mosaics in the Marian Basilicas of St Mary Major and in St Mary in Trastevere.

Theological and spiritual reflection, liturgy, Marian devotion and artistic representations truly form a single whole, a complete and effective message that is capable of arousing the wonder of the eyes, of touching the heart and of leading the intellect to an ever greater understanding of the mystery of Mary, in whom we see our destiny, our hope, clearly reflected and foretold.

I would also like to take this opportunity to invite theological and Mariological scholars to travel the *via pulchritudinis* in the hope that in our day too, thanks to a greater collaboration among theologians, liturgists and artists, incisive and effective messages can be offered for the admiration and contemplation of all.

In order to encourage those who want to make their own contribution to the promotion and realization of a new Christian humanism, accepting the proposal drawn up by the Coordinating Council, I am happy to assign *ex aequo* the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academies Award to the Marian Academy of India, a young and active Mariological-Marian society located in Bangalore, India, represented by its President, Fr Kulandaisamy Rayer, and to Prof. Luís Alberto Esteves dos Santos Casimiro for his powerful doctoral dissertation, entitled: *A Anunciação do Senhor na pintura quinhentista portuguesa (1500-1550). Análise geométrica, iconográfica e significado iconológico.*

I also want, as a sign of appreciation and encouragement, to offer the Medal of the Pontificate to the “Gen Verde” Group, part of the Focolare Movement, for its artistic activity so strongly imbued

with Gospel values and open to the dialogue between peoples and cultures.

Finally, wishing you an increasingly impassioned involvement in your respective fields of activity, I entrust each one of you and your work to the motherly protection of the Virgin Mary, *Tota Pulchra*, the Star of Hope, and I cordially impart to you, Your Eminence, and to all those present a special Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 15 December 2010

BENEDICT XVI

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