



The Holy See

**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
ON THE OCCASION OF THE STUDY DAY
ORGANIZED BY THE PONTIFICAL COUNCILS
FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND FOR CULTURE
ON THE THEME "CULTURE AND RELIGIONS IN DIALOGUE"**

To Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran

President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue

and

Archbishop Gianfranco Ravasi

President of the Pontifical Council for Culture

I would like first of all to express my great satisfaction in the combined initiative of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Pontifical Council for Culture, which have desired to organize a Study Day on the theme: *Culture and Religions in Dialogue* through which the Holy See participates at the European Union's project, approved in December 2006, declaring the year 2008 the "European Year of Intercultural Dialogue". Together with the Presidents of the above-mentioned Pontifical Councils, I cordially greet the Cardinals, my venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, the distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, as well as the Representatives of various Religions and all who are taking part in this important meeting.

For many years Europe has been aware of its essential cultural unity, despite the constellation of national cultures that shaped its countenance. It is good to emphasize that contemporary Europe, which begins its venture into the Third Millennium, is the product of two millennia of civilization. It is deeply rooted in the large and ancient patrimony of Athens and Rome and in the fertile terrain of Christianity, which proved capable of creating new cultural heritages while at the same time receiving the original contribution of every civilization. The new humanism that emerged from the dissemination of the Gospel message exalts all the elements worthy of the human person and of his transcendent vocation, purifying them from the dross that obscures the authentic face of man created in the image and likeness of God. Thus Europe today appears to us as a precious cloth

whose fabric is woven from the principles and values spun from the Gospel, while the national cultures have been able to embroider it with an immense variety of perspectives that express the religious, intellectual, technical, scientific and artistic abilities of the *Homo europeus*. In this sense, we may affirm that Europe has had and still has a cultural influence on the entire human race, and cannot fail to feel particularly responsible not only for its own future but also for the future of humanity as a whole.

In today's context, in which our contemporaries ask themselves ever more often the essential questions on the meaning of life and its value, it appears more important than ever to reflect on the ancient roots from which abundant sap has flowed in the course of centuries. The theme of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, therefore, is emerging as a priority for the European Union and transversally concerns the sectors of culture and communication, of education and science, of migration and of minorities, reaching as far as the sectors of youth and of work.

Once diversity has been accepted as a positive factor, it is necessary to ensure that people not only accept the existence of other cultures but also desire to be enriched by them. In a discourse to Catholics, my Predecessor, the Servant of God Paul VI, spelled out his deep conviction in these words: "The Church must enter into dialogue with the world in which she lives. She has something to say, a message to give, a communication to make" (Encyclical *Ecclesiam suam*, n. 65). We live in what is usually called a "pluralistic world", characterized by the speed of communications, the mobility of peoples and their economic, political and cultural interdependence. Precisely in this period, at times dramatic, even if many Europeans unfortunately seem to ignore Europe's Christian roots, they are alive and should trace the path and nourish the hope of millions of citizens who share the same values.

Thus may believers always be ready to promote initiatives of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, in order to encourage collaboration on themes of mutual interest, such as the dignity of the human person, the search for the common good, the building of peace, and development. In this regard the Holy See has given special importance to its own participation in the high-level dialogue on understanding among religions and cultures and on cooperation for peace, within the framework of the 62nd General Assembly of the United Nations (4-5 October 2007). If it is to be authentic, such a dialogue must avoid sinking into relativism and syncretism and must be inspired by sincere respect for others and by a generous spirit of reconciliation and fraternity.

I encourage all who are dedicated to building a Europe that is welcoming, supportive and increasingly faithful to its roots. In particular, I exhort believers not only to contribute to jealously guarding the cultural and spiritual heritage that distinguishes them and is an integral part of their history, but also to be more committed to seeking new ways to face adequately the great challenges that mark the post-modern epoch. Among these, I limit myself to mentioning the defence of human life in each of its stages, the safeguard of all human and family rights, the building of a just and solidary world, respect for creation, and intercultural and interreligious

dialogue. In this prospective, I express my good wishes for the success of the planned Study Day, and invoke upon all of the participants an abundance of God's Blessings.

From the Vatican, 3 December 2008

BENEDICTVS PP. XVI

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