



The Holy See

***LETTER OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO CARDINAL ANGELINI***

To my Venerable Brother Cardinal Fiorenzo Angelini

I am pleased to extend my cordial greeting to Your Eminence, and I ask you to share it with the distinguished speakers and all who are attending the second congress organized by the International Institute for Research on the Face of Christ.

This important study conference makes a valuable contribution to the deeper examination of a theme that is central to Christian piety and which boasts sound foundations in Sacred Scripture, in the Patristic tradition, in the constant Magisterium of the Church, in the Eastern and Western liturgy, in theological reflection and in the highest expressions of iconography, literature and art.

Founded in the spring of last year on your initiative and that of the Benedictine Congregation of the Reparatrix Sisters of the Holy Face of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the International Institute for Research on the Face of Christ intends, according to its Statutes, to give scholarly affirmation and practical witness to the close connection between Christology and research on the Holy Face of the Redeemer, through the triple initiative of promoting its knowledge, studying its doctrine and spreading its spirituality.

To know and contemplate the face of God has been a human aspiration in every age. The difficulty, wariness or prohibition of portraying the divinity stems from the awareness that every attempt to apply an image to God is inadequate. Nevertheless, the ancient invocation of the Psalm: "O Lord, let the light of your countenance shine upon us" (4:7) prophetically introduced the revelation of Christ, because the God of the Covenant revealed his nature as a personal Being, indeed as the Father, who in the Incarnation would assume, in Christ, a face both human and divine. It is Jesus himself who declares this to the Apostle Philip: "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9).

Christian revelation frees the depiction of God from any anthropomorphism. In Christ, divinity is united with humanity and becomes visible in the merciful and compassionate face of the Saviour, in the mystery of his Incarnation, Passion, Death and Resurrection.

Your congress — in which the Ezio Aletti Study and Research Centre of Rome, which promotes ecumenical contacts at the personal level and through appropriate meetings and publications, has also taken part — utilizes the interventions of theology professors from various Roman universities and from different nations of the world, of scholars, scientists and researchers, of experts in art and other disciplines.

With ecumenical sensitivity, the participants in the congress have also had the opportunity to hear the voice of distinguished brethren from the Orthodox Churches, not to mention the contribution that Judaism can bring to the study of this subject.

In a society such as the one in which we live, an attentive and prayerful reflection on the Holy Face of Christ will certainly help to make evangelization more effective, as was confirmed by the extraordinary emotion and sincere piety aroused by the recent exposition of the Shroud of Turin. May the veneration and study of the Holy Face dispose hearts to reflect in a particular way on the Person of the Father, which the Church is about to do next year, in preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000. With this wish I encourage all who are committed to promoting devotion to the Holy Face of Jesus, and, through the intercession of Blessed Mary, who was intimately joined to the mission of Christ, I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to Your Eminence, to the Reparatrix Sisters of the Holy Face of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and to those taking part in this international congress.

From the Vatican, 23 October 1998.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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