



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO BISHOP DE NICOLÒ
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 21st MEETING
FOR FRIENDSHIP AMONG PEOPLES HELD IN RIMINI**

*To my Venerable Brother
The Most Reverend Mariano De Nicolò
Bishop of Rimini*

On the occasion of the 21st Meeting for Friendship among Peoples, which will take place in Rimini as it does every year, I am pleased to send my warmest greetings to you, to the organizers and to the participants.

For the Meeting in this Holy Year, when the Church is celebrating the bimillenary Great Jubilee of Christ's birth, an appropriate theme was chosen: "*2,000 years, an ideal without end*". This was chosen to focus attention on the Christian event which was made manifest at Bethlehem and extended to the horizons of God's kingdom.

Jesus' birth, in fact, as I recalled in proclaiming the Jubilee, "is not an event which can be consigned to the past. The whole of human history in fact stands in reference to him: our own time and the future of the world are illumined by his presence" (Bull *Incarnationis mysterium*, n. 1) With the theme of this Meeting, with the discussions which throughout the week will explore its meaning, but especially with the reality of this annual gathering itself, you intend to make yourselves an explicit and conscious echo of the great mystery which the whole Church is reliving during the Jubilee Year: the Incarnation of the Son of God. This is a mystery which transcends man and history and, at the same time, deeply pervades them: Jesus is "the genuine newness which surpasses all human expectations"; and in the encounter with him, "every man discovers the mystery of his own life" (ibid.).

These words, which describe the essence of Christianity, open onto the horizon recalled by the

meeting's theme: "*an ideal without end*".

In current language, "ideal" is often understood as something opposed to the "real", as something to aspire to, but at the level of thought or of "ideas", even at times without a concrete basis in reality.

On the other hand, *in Christianity the ideal* is an infinitely great objective, immensely beautiful and true, supremely right, a goal to which our hearts turn with all our strength, without our desire for it ever being exhausted; but at the same time, it is *something which we already possess, or rather, something which possesses us* and corresponds to our being and its expectations, laying a basis of solid realism for our hope in infinity.

Christians are aware of this because of their own experience, meditated upon in the light of Sacred Scripture and lived by following Christ. No event in the world's long history corresponds to the ideal as does *the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate Word*. He, who is the first-born of us all (cf. *Col 1: 18*) and contains in himself the fullness of every human dimension (cf. *Col 1: 19*), has instilled in our hearts an insatiable longing for this fullness, which makes us seek it through the various experiences of life.

It is "*an ideal without end*" which forms an integral part of the *Church's* journey. The Church's history is therefore enticing, and today we are called to make our contribution to it: to show the men and women of our time the reasonableness of faith, the humanism of charity, the constructive energy of hope. For this to be possible, the Christian ideal must not be reduced to a dream, an ideology or a utopia, but must become more and more a proclamation, a witness and a way of life for believers.

In this we are guided and enlightened by *the example of the saints*, who found in Christ the light and daily support for their journey and for their commitment to the service of God's kingdom. Holiness is truly our common goal: it shows that Christ's ideal is an ideal without end. I hope that everyone taking part in this programme and all the friends of the Meeting will follow in the footsteps of the many men and women who for 2,000 years have been generous witnesses to this unchanged ideal, so that it will be a seed of hope in the furrows of the third millennium.

With these sentiments, I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you, venerable Brother, and to the entire "Meeting Family".

From the Vatican, 2 August 2000.

