



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE 6th NATIONAL MEETING
OF THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS**

Distinguished University Teachers,

1. More than a year has passed since the meeting we had for the Jubilee, but the enthusiasm of those unique and valuable days has not faded.

It was first and foremost the opportunity for a personal encounter with Him, with Jesus the Lord, our only Master. He is our living source, our centre for outreach, the nourishment that in the Word and in the Eucharist becomes an inner experience.

Our meeting was also the opportunity to acquire an *ever deeper awareness of the Church*, in the reciprocity of communion and in brotherly support of all who recognize themselves in Christ as members of one great family. This is the source of *a renewed and enthusiastic witness* that is aimed at imbuing daily university work with the dynamism of a meaningful, generous and genuine presence.

You have gathered once again for this meeting, accepting the invitation to "*put out into the deep*" which I presented as a horizon of hope and action for the whole Church, hence also to you, so that you may reflect on the practical implications that the outlook of new humanism entails for your university.

2. These are times of great change, and even ancient and venerable institutions, such as many of the Italian universities, are called to renew themselves. Multiple noble and worthy factors are interwoven in this process; at other times, on the contrary, they tend rather to exploit it at the risk of reducing knowledge to a means of self-affirmation, labelling the professionalism of teaching as an apprenticeship of a utilitarian and pragmatic sort.

The teacher is a master. He does not pass on knowledge like an object to be used and disposed of; he first establishes a sapiential relationship. Even when a personal meeting is impossible due to the large number of students and even before notions can be imparted, this becomes a word of life. *The teacher provides instruction* in the original sense of the term, that is, he makes a substantial contribution to building the personality; he *educates*, in the sense of the ancient Socratic image, helping his students to discover and to make use of the skills and gifts of each one. He *forms* them in accordance with this word's humanistic meaning, which is not to be reduced to the acquisition of professional skills, although these are necessary, but incorporates them in a solid construction and a transparent co-relation of life's meanings.

3. You have been called to teach. This is a *vocation*, a Christian vocation. At times it is perceived as one's own project from the earliest years; at others, it is revealed through what seem to be chance events but in fact are providential and mark each person's personal history. There, at your teacher's chair and desk, God has called you by name to an indispensable service to the truth about man.

This is *the heart of the new humanism*. It is born of the capacity to show that the word of faith really is a power that enlightens consciences, frees them from all servitude and renders them capable of good. The young generations expect of you new syntheses, not of an encyclopaedic type but of a humanistic form of knowledge. It is necessary to overcome the fragmentation that confuses and to write up open programmes that can motivate the commitment to research and to the communication of knowledge and, at the same time, form people who do not end by turning against the human person the tremendous potential achieved by scientific and technological progress in our time. Just as at the beginning of humanity, today also, when man wishes to act alone as an arbiter of the fruits of the tree of knowledge, he ends by finding himself the sad perpetrator of fear, conflict and death.

4. The *reform* involving schools and universities that is *underway* in Italy challenges the Church's pastoral activity, both in order to overcome forms of stagnation in cultural dialogue and to acquire a fresh approach to fostering the meeting of human minds, giving greater incentives to the quest for truth, scientific advances and the transmission of culture. Today too, we should rediscover a renewed trend toward the unity of knowledge - that of the *uni-versitas* - with innovative courage in planning a curriculum of studies for a high-profile cultural and formative plan that serves the whole man.

The Church - which looks to universities with great attention, because she has received much from them and expects much - has something to contribute to this task. First of all, continuously mindful that "the heart of every culture is its approach to the greatest of all mysteries: the mystery of God" (*Address to the United Nations for its 50th anniversary*, n. 9; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 11 October 1995). Furthermore, recalling that only in this absolute verticality - of one who believes and therefore always pursues a deeper knowledge of the truth he has encountered, but

also of the one who is searching and is thus on the path of faith - are culture and knowledge illumined by truth and offered to the human being as a gift of life.

5. Christian humanism is not abstract. The freedom in research that is so precious cannot imply neutral indifference to the truth. Universities are increasingly called to become workshops in which a universal humanism open to the spiritual dimension of the truth is encouraged and developed.

The *service of the truth* is the epoch-making mission of universities. It recalls the contemplative dimension of knowledge which heightens the humanistic feature of every discipline in the areas addressed by your convention. The ability to interpret the meaning of events and to appreciate the most daring discoveries stems from this interior attitude. The service of truth is the mark of free and open intelligence. Only by embodying these convictions in his daily activity can the university teacher become a bearer of hope in his personal and social life. Christians are called to bear witness to the dignity of human reason, to its requirements and its capacity for seeking out and knowing reality, thereby overcoming epistemological scepticism, the ideological reductions of rationalism and the nihilistic dead ends of weak thought.

Faith is capable of generating culture; it does not fear an open and frank cultural confrontation; its certitude has nothing in common with the rigidity of ideological preconception; it is the bright light of the truth that does not oppose the riches of the intelligence, but only the darkness of error. Christian faith enlightens and explains human existence in every context. Urged on by this inner richness, Christians spread it courageously and witness to it consistently.

6. Culture cannot be reduced to the level of instrumental use: *its focus is and must remain the human person*, with his dignity and his openness to the Absolute. The delicate and complex work of the "evangelization of culture" and the "inculturation of faith" is not content with simple adjustments, but calls for a faithful rethinking and a creative, innovative expression of the methodological tool that the Church in Italy recently wished to adopt: "the cultural project with a Christian orientation". This is born of an awareness that "the synthesis between culture and faith is not just a demand of culture, but also of faith.... A faith which does not become culture is a faith which has not been fully received, nor thoroughly thought through, nor faithfully lived out" (John Paul II, *Letter establishing the Pontifical Council for Culture*, 20 May 1982; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 28 June 1982, p. 7).

Intellectual charity works to respond to such huge challenges. This is the specific task that Catholic university teachers are called to fulfil, in the conviction that the power of the Gospel is capable of profound renewal. May the "*Logos*" of God encounter the human "*logos*" and become "*dia-logos*": here is what the Church expects and hopes from universities and the world of culture.

May the new humanism be for you an outlook, a plan, a commitment. It will then become a vocation to holiness for all those who work in universities. At the beginning of this new millennium,

you are all called to this "*high standard*".

As a pledge of my best wishes for your meeting on which I invoke an abundance of heavenly light, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to each one of you and your respective families.

From the Vatican, 4 October 2001.

JOHN PAUL II

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