



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE PARTICIPANTS OF A SEMINAR ON
EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION***

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Monday, 10 April 2006*

*Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Presbyterate,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I am pleased to welcome you and cordially greet all of you who are taking part in the Seminar on the theme: "*The Cultural Heritage and Academic Values of the European University and the Attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area*". You come from about 50 European countries that adhere to the so-called "Bologna Process", to which the Holy See has also made its own contribution.

I greet Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski, Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, who has addressed courteous and respectful words to me on your behalf, at the same time explaining the objectives of your meeting, and I thank him for organizing this meeting in the Vatican in collaboration with the Conference of Rectors of the Pontifical Universities, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, UNESCO-CEPES and the Council of Europe, with the sponsorship of the European Commission.

I address a special greeting to the Ministers and Representatives of the various International Bodies who have wished to attend.

In these days, your reflection has focused on the contribution that European universities, enriched by their long tradition, can offer to building the Europe of the third millennium, taking into account

the fact that every cultural reality is both a memory of the past and a project for the future.

The Church intends to make her own contribution to this reflection as she has done over the centuries. She has taken a constant interest in the study centres and universities of Europe which, together with "the service of thought", have passed on to the young generations the values of a special cultural patrimony, enriched by two millenniums of humanist and Christian experience (cf. *Ecclesia in Europa*, n. 59).

At first, monasticism exercised considerable influence. Its merits, both in the spiritual and religious context, also extend to the economic and intellectual spheres. In Charlemagne's time, real schools were founded with the Church's contribution, and the Emperor wanted as many people as possible to benefit from them.

A few centuries later, the university came into being, receiving an essential impetus from the Church. Numerous European universities, from the University of Bologna to those of Paris, Krakow, Salamanca, Cologne, Oxford and Prague, to mention but a few, rapidly developed and played an important role in consolidating the European identity and building up its cultural heritage.

University institutions have always been distinguished by love of wisdom and the quest for truth, as the true purpose of universities, with constant reference to the Christian vision that recognizes the human being as the masterpiece of creation, since he is formed in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gn 1: 26-27).

The conviction that there is a profound unity between truth and good, between the eyes of the mind and those of the heart: "*Ubi amor, ibi oculos*", as Riccardo di San Vittore said (cf. *Beniamin minor*, c. 13), has always been typical of this vision: love makes one see. Universities came into being from the love of knowledge and from the curiosity of knowing, of knowing what the world is, what man is, but also from a knowledge that leads to action, that leads ultimately to love.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, with a quick glance at the "old" Continent it is easy to see the cultural challenges that Europe faces today, since it is committed to rediscovering its own identity, which is not exclusively economic or political. The basic question today, as in the past, remains the anthropological question: What is man? Where does he come from? Where must he go? How must he go?

In other words, it is a matter of clarifying the conception of the human being on which new projects are based.

And you are rightly asking yourselves which human being, which image of man, does the university intend to serve: an individual withdrawn into the defence of his own interests, a single

perspective of interests, a materialistic perspective, or a person who is open to solidarity with others in the search for the true meaning of existence, which must be a common meaning that transcends the individual?

We also wonder what the relationship between the human person, science and technology is. If in the 19th and 20th centuries, technology made amazing progress, at the beginning of the 21st century, further steps were taken: technology also took charge, thanks to computer science, of part of our mental processes, with consequences that involve our way of thinking and can condition our very freedom.

It must be forcefully stated that the human being cannot and must not ever be sacrificed to the success of science and technology: this is why the so-called "anthropological question" assumes its full importance.

For us, the heirs of the humanist tradition founded on Christian values, this question should be faced in the light of the inspiring principles of our civilization, which found in European universities authentic laboratories for research and for deepening knowledge.

"From the biblical conception of man Europe drew the best of its humanistic culture", John Paul II noted in his Post-Synodal Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, "and, not least, advanced the dignity of the person as a subject of inalienable rights" (n. 25). Thus, "the Church", my venerable Predecessor added, "helped to spread and consolidate those values which have made European culture universal" (*ibid.*).

But man cannot understand himself fully if he ignores God. This is the reason why, at the time when the Europe of the third millennium is being built, the religious dimension of human existence cannot be neglected.

Here the special role of the university emerges as a scientific universe that is not merely limited to various specializations: in the current situation the university is required not to stop at teaching or imparting technical and professional knowledge, which are very important disciplines but do not suffice, for it must also undertake to play an attentive educational role at the service of the new generations, making use of the legacy of ideals and values that marked the past millenniums.

Thus, universities will be able to help Europe to preserve and rediscover its "soul", revitalizing the Christian roots that brought it into being.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, may God make your work and your efforts benefit the many young people who are the hope of Europe. I accompany this wish with the assurance of a special prayer for each one of you, and I implore the divine Blessing for you all.

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