



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE MEETING
ORGANIZED BY THE INTERNATIONAL CENTER
FOR RELATIVISTIC ASTROPHYSICS**

*Castel Gandolfo
Friday, 14 September 1990*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,*

1. I extend a cordial welcome to the participants in the *meeting organized by the International Center for Relativistic Astrophysics* on the theme of "Relativistic Gravitational Experiments in Space". Your initiative, which brings together distinguished scientists from the European Space Agency, the Italian Space Agency, Stanford University, the University of Rome and the Specola Vaticana reflects the kind of cooperation and solidarity needed for the advancement of knowledge in a world that has become increasingly complex and interdependent.

The Church has often expressed her esteem for science and for those men and women who devote their lives to the study of the heavens and the earth, "the world and all that is in it" (*Ps.* 89(88), 11). Your present meeting honours one such scientist, *William Fairbank*, whose creative research and diversity of interests made him a pioneer in many of the areas of science which you are currently discussing. It is fitting that you honour the memory of this dedicated man of science by continuing to seek answers to some of the questions which he raised in the fields of gravity and the extremely delicate space experiments on gravity required in order to test crucial predictions of Einstein's theory of space and time.

Your meeting also provides an example of international cooperation among scientists on behalf of the authentic progress of the human family. The participation of the Vatican Observatory in this meeting bears witness to the Church's deep conviction that *scientific research*, undertaken in a

spirit of humility and reverence for the truth, *leads to a deeper appreciation of the Creator's wisdom* and, consequently, to a greater respect for the inalienable dignity and freedom of every person. Religion and science ought to collaborate closely in promoting the fundamental human values of peace, mutual understanding and effective solidarity among all peoples.

2. On the occasion of the three hundredth anniversary of the publication of Isaac Newton's *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, I had occasion to refer to *the relationship between the academic community of the natural sciences and the faith community which is the Church*. These two very different but important institutions have had and continue to have a major influence on the development of ideas and values and on the course of human action. Both are committed - each according to its proper nature, methods and goals - to pursuing the same truth and to understanding the same universe. Today I wish to express once again my belief that our mutual concern for the full truth about the origins and destiny of the universe and of humanity can be both a foundation and stimulus for a more dynamic dialogue between religion and the natural sciences.

Indeed, both science and religion stand to benefit from an interactive relationship in which each discipline, while retaining its own autonomy and integrity, nonetheless remains open to the discoveries and insights of the other.

Our times, marked as they are by a fragmentation of knowledge and a separation between truth and values, have great need of such dialogue, based on critical openness and aimed at overcoming unilateral or partial views of reality. In the search for a truly adequate account of man and his place in the cosmos, "the Church and the scientific community will inevitably interact: their options do not include isolation" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Epistula Moderatori speculae Vaticanae missa*, die 1 iun. 1988: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XI, 2 (1988) 1716). On the one hand, Christians must have an enlightened vision of the world in which they are called to live their faith. Today this *vision is deeply shaped by science*. They must therefore look at the findings of science critically and with depth, not with shallowness or bias. On the other hand, scientists need a framework in which *to give meaning and value to their lives and their world*, and the reflective depth of theological wisdom can help them attain that framework. It also allows them to avoid an absolutizing of their results beyond their reasonable and proper limits (Cfr. *ibid*).

3. On the occasion of your meeting, I wish to assure you once more of the Church's encouragement and her gratitude for your efforts to seek the good of mankind through knowledge of the natural world. As you build upon the legacy which you have received from those who have gone before you, may you come to know the liberating power of truth (Cfr. *Io.* 8, 32) and draw nearer to Him whose voice is heard in the discourse of creatures (Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes*, 36). Assuring you of my best wishes for the success of your work, I invoke God's abundant blessings upon you and all your loved ones.

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