



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS OF A CONFERENCE
SPONSORED BY THE VATICAN OBSERVATORY**

Friday, 27 September 1991

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am pleased to welcome you, distinguished participants in the Workshop organized by the *Vatican Observatory* and the *Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences*, at Berkeley in California. This is the second in a series of meetings aimed at fostering interdisciplinary research in the areas of the natural sciences, philosophy and theology. You come from different cultural and religious backgrounds and your scholarly pursuits represent a wide variety of disciplines. You personify that diversity which enriches the pursuit of unity in the many areas of human culture.

The first of your Conferences, in September 1987, was held to commemorate the three hundredth anniversary of the publication of Isaac Newton's *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*. In a Message published as an introduction to the proceedings of that Conference, I restated my keen desire that a new relationship between science and religion should be fostered, by means of a deeper interchange regarding important questions, vital to the life of society, which concern both realms of investigation (cf. John Paul II, *Letter to the Director of the Vatican Observatory*, 1 June 1988). Your present Workshop is a clear sign that such an interdisciplinary approach is both possible and fruitful.

2. The theme you have chosen is a particularly significant one: *The Quantum Creation of the Universe and the Origins of the Laws of Nature*. It not only includes such fundamental concepts in the natural sciences as quantum physics, quantum gravity, cosmology and physical laws, but also such religious themes as creation, God and nature, the natural and the supernatural, miracles, and others. You have chosen a difficult task, but one which offers the promise of advancing the understanding of concepts essential to the meeting of religion and science.

The rift between science and religion dates back to the beginning of modern science itself. In the seventeenth century, with Galileo and Newton as principal protagonists, the experimental method was perfected and the application of mathematics to scientific research was begun. This growth of the natural sciences was sometimes accompanied by a certain kind of rationalism which contended that everything could be explained by scientific reasoning alone or, as later developed, by the conviction that nothing could be explained since the existence of absolute truth was altogether disallowed. Thus the question of God was often scrutinized by such a method as to make it seem devoid of meaning (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 19). This led, in not a few sectors of ecclesial life, to a cautious and suspicious view of science as being tainted with atheism, and thus a divorce between science and religion was set for decades to come.

In principle the Church could not accept such a rift, convinced as she was that the truth of nature and the truth of revelation come from the same divine source. The very words with which Pope Leo XIII re-instituted the *Vatican Observatory* a hundred years ago summarized the Church's unremitting hope for a renewed dialogue and collaboration with the world of science. In the founding document Pope Leo wrote: "in taking up this work we have become involved not only in helping to promote a very noble science, which more than any other human discipline raises the spirit of mortals to the contemplation of heavenly events, but we have in the first place put before ourselves the plan . . . that everyone might see that the Church and her Pastors are not opposed to true and solid science, whether human or divine, but that they embrace it, encourage it, and promote it with the fullest possible dedication" (Leo XIII, *Ut Mysticam*, 14 March 1891).

3. In more recent times, the Church's growing interest in the natural sciences has sometimes been accompanied by a tendency on the part of some towards a misuse of scientific results to bolster religious beliefs. In its *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, the Second Vatican Council rejected this approach and deplored "certain habits of mind, sometimes found also among Christians, which do not sufficiently attend to the rightful independence of science" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 36). What the Council advocated, in effect, was an attitude of mutual openness and a new relationship of collaboration in the service of the human family.

It sought to put aside definitively any remaining fears regarding the hoped-for dialogue. The *Constitution* states: "if methodical investigation within every branch of learning is carried out in a genuinely scientific manner and in accord with moral norms, it never truly conflicts with faith. For earthly matters and the concerns of faith derive from the same God. Indeed, whoever labours to penetrate the secrets of reality with a humble and steady mind is, even unawares, being led by the hand of God, who holds all things in existence and gives them their identity" (*Ibid.*). As I wrote regarding your 1987 Workshop: "The unprecedented opportunity we have today is for a common interactive relationship in which each discipline retains its integrity and yet is radically open to the discoveries and insights of the other" (John Paul II, *Letter to the Director of the Vatican Observatory*, 1 June 1988).

I am confident that your discussions will seek to illustrate the common ground of a fruitful collaboration. May your interchange lead all of us to a clearer and fuller discovery of that Truth which is the source of all our light and understanding. May God bless you abundantly.

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