



The Holy See

JUBILEE OF SCIENTISTS

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

Thursday, 25 May 2000

Your Eminences,

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,

*Dear Friends who represent the world of learning and research,*¹ I welcome you with deep joy on the occasion of your Jubilee pilgrimage. I thank Cardinal Paul Poupard, President of the Pontifical Council for Culture, for his words of welcome and for having organized this Jubilee, together with his entire staff. I express my deep gratitude to H.E. Prof. Nicola Cabibbo, President of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, for his tribute to me on behalf of you all. In past centuries, science, whose discoveries are fascinating, has held a dominant place and at times was considered the only criterion of truth or way to happiness. A reflection based exclusively on scientific elements tried to accustom us to a culture of suspicion and doubt. It refused to consider the existence of God or to view man in the mystery of his origin and his end, as if this perspective might call science itself into question. It sometimes saw God merely as a mental construct which would not stand up to scientific knowledge. These attitudes have estranged science from man and from the service it is called to offer him.² Today "we face a great challenge ... to move from *phenomenon* to *foundation*, a step as necessary as it is urgent. We cannot stop short at experience alone; ... speculative thinking must penetrate to the spiritual core and the ground from which it rises" (Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, n. 83). Scientific research is also based on the capacity of the human mind to discover what is universal. This openness to knowledge leads to the ultimate and fundamental meaning of the human person in the world (cf. *ibid.*, n. 81). "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork" (Ps 19:1); with these words the psalmist evokes the "silent account" of the Creator's marvellous work inscribed in the reality of creation itself. Those involved in research are called in a certain way to have the same experience as the psalmist and to experience the same wonder. "One must aim at encouraging the human spirit to develop its faculties of wonder, of understanding, of contemplation, of forming personal judgements and cultivating a religious, moral and social sense" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 59).³ Based on an attentive observation of the complexity of terrestrial phenomena, and following the object and method proper to each discipline, scientists discover the laws which govern the universe, as well as their interrelationship. They stand in wonderment and humility before the created order and feel drawn to the love of the Author of all things. Faith, for its part, is able to integrate and assimilate every research,

for all research, through a deeper understanding of created reality in all its specificity, gives man the possibility of discovering the Creator, source and goal of all things. "Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made" (Rom 1:20). By increasing his knowledge of the universe, and in particular of the human being, who is at its centre, man has a veiled perception, as it were, of the presence of God, a presence which he is able to discern in the "silent manuscript" written by the Creator in creation, the reflection of his glory and grandeur. God loves to make himself heard in the silence of creation, in which the intellect senses the transcendence of the Lord of Creation. Everyone who seeks to understand the secrets of creation and the mysteries of man must be ready to open their mind and heart to the deep truth which manifests itself there, and which "draws the intellect to give its consent" (St Albert the Great, *Commentary on John*, 6, 44).⁴ The Church has a great esteem for scientific and technological research, since it "is a significant expression of man's dominion over creation" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2293) and a service to truth, goodness and beauty. From Copernicus to Mendel, from Albert the Great to Pascal, from Galileo to Marconi, the history of the Church and the history of the sciences clearly show us that there is a scientific culture rooted in Christianity. It can be said, in fact, that research, by exploring the greatest and the smallest, contributes to the glory of God which is reflected in every part of the universe. Faith is not afraid of reason. They "are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth - in a word, to know himself - so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves" (Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, Proem). If in the past the separation of faith and reason was a tragedy for man, who risked losing his interior unity under the threat of an ever more fragmented knowledge, today your mission is to carry on your research with the conviction that "for the intelligent man ... all things are in harmony and agreement" (Gregory Palamas, *Theophanes*). I invite you, then, to ask the Lord to give you the gift of the Holy Spirit, since to love truth is to live on the Holy Spirit (cf. St Augustine, *Sermo*, 267, 4), who enables us to approach God and to call him in a loud voice: Abba, Father. May nothing prevent you from calling on him in this way, even if you are absorbed in the rigour of your analyses of the things he has set before our eyes.⁵ Dear men and women of learning, great is the responsibility to which you have been called. You are asked to work in a way that serves the good of individuals and of all humanity, while always being attentive to the dignity of every human being and to respect for creation. Every scientific approach needs an ethical base and a wise openness to a culture that respects the needs of the person. This is precisely what the writer Jean Guiton stresses when he says that in scientific research the spiritual aspect should never be separated from the intellectual (cf. *Le travail intellectuel: Conseils à ceux qui étudient et à ceux qui écrivent*, 1951, p. 29). He also recalls that, for this reason, science and technology need an indispensable reference to the value of human interiority. I turn with trust to you, men and women in the trenches of research and progress! In constantly exploring the world's mysteries, let your minds be open to the horizons that faith discloses to you. Firmly anchored to the fundamental principles and values of your journey as people of knowledge and faith, you can also engage in a useful and constructive dialogue with those who are far from Christ and his Church. Therefore, first be passionate seekers of the invisible God, who alone can satisfy the deep yearning of your lives and fill you with his grace.⁶ Men and women of learning, be motivated by the desire to bear witness to your fidelity to Christ! At the dawn of the third millennium, the rich panorama of contemporary culture is opening unprecedented and promising prospects in the dialogue between science and faith, as between philosophy and theology. Devote all your energies to developing a culture and a scientific approach which will always let God's providential presence and intervention be disclosed. In this regard, the Jubilee for men and women of learning is an encouragement and a support for everyone who is sincerely seeking the truth; it shows that it is possible to be rigorous researchers in every field of knowledge and faithful disciples of the Gospel. How can we not recall here the spiritual commitment of the many people who dedicate

themselves each day to demanding scientific work? Through those of you here, I would like to extend my greeting and my heartfelt encouragement to each of them. Men and women of learning, be builders of hope for all humanity! May God accompany you and make fruitful your efforts at the service of genuine human progress. May Mary, Seat of Wisdom, protect you. May St Thomas Aquinas and the other holy men and women who, in various fields of learning have made a remarkable contribution to an ever deeper knowledge of created reality in the light of the divine mystery intercede for you. For my part, I accompany you with constant attention and warm friendship. I assure you of a daily remembrance in my prayer and cordially bless you, along with your families and everyone who in various ways contributes with sincere and constant dedication to the scientific progress of humanity. © Copyright 2000 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana