



# The Holy See

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## JUBILEE OF UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS

### **ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS OF ALL NATIONS**

*Saturday 9 September 2000*

*Dear University Teachers,*

1. I am happy to meet you in this year of grace, when Christ powerfully calls us to a stronger faith and a deep renewal of life. I thank you especially for the commitment you have shown in the spiritual and cultural gatherings which have marked these days. Looking out at you, my thoughts turn to university teachers of all Nations as well as to the students entrusted to their guidance on the path of research, a path both arduous and joyful, and I send them cordial greetings. I greet also Senator Ortensio Zecchino, Minister for Universities, who is here representing the Italian Government.

The distinguished Professors who have just spoken have allowed me to see how rich and articulate your reflection has been. I thank them most sincerely. This Jubilee gathering has been for each of you a timely moment to consider just how well *the great event which we are celebrating, the Incarnation of the Word of God*, has been accepted as a life-giving principle informing and transforming the whole of life.

Yes, for Christ is not a symbol of some vague religious reality, rather he is *the concrete point where, in the person of the Son, God makes our humanity completely his own*. With Christ, "the Eternal enters time, the Whole lies hidden in the part, God takes on a human face" (*Fides et Ratio*, 12). This "self-emptying" of God, even to the "scandal" of the Cross (cf. *Phil 2:7*), can seem foolishness to that reason which is enamoured of itself. In fact, this self-emptying is "the power and the wisdom of God" (1 *Cor 1:23-24*) for those who are open to the unexpectedness of his love. You are here to give witness to that.

2. The basic theme which you have considered – *The University for a New Humanism* – fits well with the Jubilee's rediscovery of the centrality of Christ. In fact, the event of the Incarnation touches the very depths of humanity, it illuminates our origin and destiny and it opens us to the hope which does not disappoint. As men and women of learning, you never cease to enquire into the value of the human person. Each of you could say, with the ancient philosopher: "I am searching for man"!

Among the many responses given to this fundamental quest, you have accepted that given by Christ, a response which emerges from his words but which is seen even before shining brightly on his face. *Ecce homo*: Behold the man! (*Jn* 19:5) In showing Christ's battered face to the frenzied crowd, Pilate did not imagine that he would, in a sense, speak a word of revelation. Unwittingly, he pointed out to the world the One in whom all human beings can recognize *their origin*, and in whom all can hope to find *their salvation*. *Redemptor hominis*: this is the image of Christ which, from my first Encyclical, I have sought to "shout" to the world, and which this Jubilee year seeks to propose anew to human minds and hearts.

3. Drawing your inspiration from Christ, who reveals man to himself (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22), you have chosen in the meetings of these days to reaffirm the need for a university culture which is genuinely "humanistic", in the sense — primarily — that *culture must correspond to the human person* and overcome the temptation to a knowledge which yields to pragmatism or which loses itself in the endless meanderings of erudition. Such knowledge is incapable of giving meaning to life.

That is why you have emphasized that there is no contradiction, but rather a logical connection, between freedom of research and recognition of truth. It is to truth that all research looks, albeit with the limitations and fatigue of human thought. This is an aspect which needs to be underlined, lest we succumb to the climate of relativism to which a large part of today's culture falls prey. The reality is that if culture is not directed towards truth, which must be sought both humbly and confidently, it is doomed to disappear into the ephemeral, losing itself to the instability of opinion, and perhaps giving itself over to the domineering will — though often disguised — of the strongest.

*A culture without truth does not safeguard freedom but puts it at risk.* I have said this on a number of occasions: "The demands of truth and morality neither degrade nor abolish our freedom, but on the contrary enable freedom to exist and liberate it from its own inherent threats" (*Discorso al Convegno ecclesiale di Palermo*, in *Insegnamenti*, XVIII, 2, 1995, p. 1198). In this sense, the words of Christ remain decisive: "The truth will set you free" (*Jn* 8:32).

4. Rooted in the perspective of truth, Christian humanism implies first of all an openness to the Transcendent. It is here that we find the truth and the grandeur of the human person, the only creature in the visible world capable of self-awareness and recognizing that he is surrounded by that supreme Mystery which both reason and faith call God. What is needed is a humanism in

which the perspectives of science and faith no longer seem to be in conflict.

Yet we cannot be satisfied with an ambiguous reconciliation of the kind favoured by a culture which doubts the very ability of reason to arrive at the truth. This path runs the risk of *misconstruing faith by reducing it to a feeling*, to emotion, to art: in the end stripping faith of all critical foundation. But this would not be Christian faith, which demands instead a reasonable and responsible acceptance of all that God has revealed in Christ. *Faith does not sprout from the ashes of reason!* I strongly encourage all of you, men and women of the University, to spare no effort in rebuilding that aspect of learning which is open to Truth and the Absolute.

5. Let it be clear, however, that this "vertical" dimension of learning does not imply any kind of closing in on itself; on the contrary, by its very nature it opens out to the dimensions of all creation. And how could it be otherwise? In acknowledging the Creator, mankind recognizes the value of creatures. In opening themselves to the Word made flesh, people also accept all the things that have been made in him (cf. *Jn* 1:3) and that have been redeemed by him. We must, therefore, *rediscover the original and eschatological meaning of Creation*, respecting all its intrinsic requirements, but also enjoying it in terms of freedom, responsibility, creativity, joy, "rest" and contemplation. As a splendid passage from the Second Vatican Council reminds us, "enjoying creatures in poverty and freedom of spirit, [man] is led to possess the world in truth, as if at one and the same time he has nothing and possesses everything. 'All is yours: but you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God' (1 *Cor* 3:22-23)" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 37).

Today the most attentive epistemological reflection recognizes the need for the human and natural sciences to enter into dialogue once again, so that learning may recover the sense of a profoundly unified inspiration. Scientific and technological progress in our day puts into human hands possibilities which are both magnificent and frightening. A recognition of the limits of science, in the consideration of moral demands, is not obscurantism but is the guarantee that research will be worthy of the human person and put at the service of life.

You, my dear friends who are involved in scientific research, must make universities "cultural laboratories" in which theology, philosophy, human sciences and natural sciences may engage in constructive dialogue, looking to the moral law as an intrinsic requirement of research and a condition for its full value in seeking out the truth.

6. Knowledge enlightened by faith, far from abandoning areas of daily life, invests them with all the strength of hope and prophecy. The humanism which we desire advocates a vision of society centred on the human person and his inalienable rights, on the values of justice and peace, on a correct relationship between individuals, society and the State, on the logic of solidarity and subsidiarity. It is a humanism capable of giving a soul to economic progress itself, so that it may be directed to "the promotion of each individual and of the whole person" (cf. *Populorum Progressio*, 14; and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 30).

In particular, it is urgent for us to work to ensure that *the true sense of democracy*, an authentic achievement of culture, is fully safeguarded. In this regard, worrisome trends have emerged, as when democracy is reduced to a purely procedural matter, or when it is thought that the will of the majority is sufficient of itself to determine the moral acceptability of a law. In reality, "the value of democracy stands or falls with the values which it embodies and promotes . . . The basis of these values cannot be provisional and changeable 'majority' opinions, but only the acknowledgement of an objective moral law which, as the 'natural law' written in the human heart, is the obligatory point of reference for civil law itself" (*Evangelium Vitae*, 70).

7. Dear friends, the University too, no less than other institutions, is experiencing the trials of the present time. Nevertheless it makes an irreplaceable contribution to culture, provided that it does not lose its original character of being an institution dedicated to research and at the same time to a vital formative — I would even say "educational" — function for the benefit especially of young generations. This function must be placed at the centre of reforms and adaptations which may prove necessary for this ancient institution to remain in step with the times.

With its humanistic aspects, Christian faith can make an original contribution to the life of the University and to its educational task, to the extent that Christian witness is borne by energetic thought and coherency of life, in a critical and constructive dialogue with those who promote a different vision. It is my hope that this perspective will be further developed in the worldwide meetings which will soon see the involvement of rectors, administrative directors of universities, university chaplains, and students themselves in their international "forum".

8. Distinguished teachers! On the Gospel is founded an understanding of the world and of the human person which does not cease to unleash cultural, humanistic and ethical values for a correct vision of life and of history. Be profoundly convinced of this, and make it a gauge of your commitment.

The Church, which historically has played a primary role in the actual birth of Universities, continues to look upon them with deep fondness, and from you she expects a decisive contribution so that this institution will enter into the new Millennium having fully rediscovered itself as a place in which openness to knowledge, passion for truth, and interest in the future of humanity may develop in a noteworthy way. May this Jubilee meeting place its indelible mark within each of you and inspire you with new strength for this demanding task.

With this desire, in the name of Christ, the Lord of history and the Redeemer of mankind, I bless you all with great affection.

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