



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE EIGHTH VATICAN
OBSERVATORY SCHOOL IN ASTROPHYSICS**

To the Participants in the Eighth Vatican Observatory School in Astrophysics

The Eighth Vatican Observatory School in Astrophysics is the latest in the series of Schools stretching over the last fifteen years which have brought together more than two hundred young scholars and their teachers from every continent. They have come from over fifty nations, many of them from developing countries. From the beginning, the Schools have aimed to share the most recent results of astrophysical research with young scholars at an important time in their professional development. Their purpose has also been to contribute to progress in developing countries by introducing some of their most talented young people to the best of current scientific practice and theory in this area.

The heart of the Schools is the exchange of professional knowledge and personal experience between the teachers and students. Your personal and professional friendships, which embrace a variety of political, cultural and religious differences, are one of the most precious fruits of the School, and I pray that these bonds will endure through the years.

In this year's School, you have been studying the final state of stars as they come to exhaust their normal sources of energy. This leads to an examination of some of the most fundamental characteristics of the universe, and inevitably directs our thoughts to our own destiny within that universe. The desire to understand creation and our own place within it according to the strict canons of science is one of the noblest of human aspirations; and I trust that the School will inspire you to pursue scientific knowledge in such a way that a fast-changing and troubled world will benefit from your dedication to understanding its mysteries.

The study of the astrophysical nature of stellar remnants may seem to have little to do with the betterment of humanity. Yet those who closely examine reality as scientists, artists, philosophers

or theologians, and those who struggle to improve the economic, social and political conditions of the world's peoples soon come to realize that all that is true, good and beautiful has its ultimate unique source in the One in whom 'we live and move and have our being' (*Acts 17:28*). Your astrophysical research is not a luxury remote from the daily concerns of people and irrelevant to the building of a more humane world. What you do as scientists is important for all of us, especially when your empirically grounded vision of reality leads to an understanding of the human person as an integral element in the created universe, that is, when it leads to the wisdom which is at the heart of all genuine humanism.

Yet our understanding of ourselves and of the universe will reach a point of true wisdom only if we are open to the many ways in which the human mind comes to knowledge: through science, art, philosophy, theology. Your scientific research will be most creative and beneficial to society when it helps to unify the knowledge deriving from these different sources, and leads to a fruitful dialogue with those who are working in other fields of learning. I am confident that the Vatican Observatory Schools in Astrophysics make a valuable contribution to such a unifying view of knowledge.

On this occasion I also wish to thank those of you who are helping to support the work of the Vatican Observatory. Through your interest in the Observatory, you share in the journey of these young scholars as they seek to understand a universe which is slowly revealing itself in all its vastness and mystery. Science has certainly been one of humanity's guiding lights on its journey through time; but, as we seek to unify our scientific knowledge with all that we know as human beings, we sense that we are being led to other still more mysterious realities and that our passion to know is incomplete if it does not spark in us the desire to give and receive love.

As I greet you today, the words of the Psalm come to mind: 'How great is your name, O Lord our God, through all the earth! When I see the heavens, the work of your hands, the moon and the stars which you arranged, what is man that you should keep him in mind, mortal man that you care for him?' (*Psalms 8: 2.4-5*). With heartfelt thanks for your contribution to our knowledge of the cosmos and of the Love that gives it life, I invoke upon all of you the abundant blessings of God whose name is great through all the universe.

From the Vatican, 2 July 2001

JOHN PAUL II