



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE COMMUNITY AND GRADUATES
OF THE PONTIFICAL URBAN COLLEGE**

Friday, 29 November 2002

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Academic Authorities,
Dear Students,*

1. With great joy I welcome you today on the occasion of the solemn celebration of the 375th anniversary of the Urban College, and the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the Pontifical Urban University. I greet Cardinal Crescenzo Sepe and thank him for his cordial address on your behalf.

I greet the Magnificent Rector of the University, the Cardinals, the Bishops, the Academic Authorities, the professors, the participants in the International Congress, and the students of the college and university, who bring to our meeting their warm enthusiasm.

2. My memorable predecessor, Bl. John XXIII, on the very threshold of the Second Vatican Council, bestowed the title of "university" on the Urban College. In recent years, multitudes of young people - seminarians, priests, religious and lay people - have received a spiritual and cultural formation which has enabled them to be ready to live their faith in a solid way, bearing witness even in situations of hardship. Some of them have certainly joined the ranks of the "witnesses of the faith", who died during the last century, and whom we commemorated in the moving prayer at the Colosseum during the Jubilee Year.

Founded as a college by Pope Urban VIII with the Bull *Immortalis Dei Filius*, your university, which took his name, from its inception, has had a missionary goal. The concern of Pope Urban was

justly that of emancipating the Church from the colonial powers. Indeed, the Church had to guarantee the freedom of evangelization in the recently discovered lands, and in countries, such as China, where Christianity had been proclaimed in the distant past.

3. If those were difficult times, we cannot say that our own are easy. Certainly, you know it very well who come from areas where war, disease, and poverty mow down multitudes of victims every day. More necessary than ever before is an academic institution like yours that knows how to pass on philosophical, theological, historical and juridical knowledge within the cultures of peoples who are so widely different.

As I had the occasion to say during my first visit of 1980, your university expresses the universal character that is typical of the Catholic Church. Whoever studies here must bring with him a sensitivity that is open to the values of other cultures, comparing them with the evangelical message.

Today 90 institutes all over the world are affiliated with your university, testifying in this way to the truly "catholic" openness that defines it. I want to send them a special greeting: Always cultivate in your hearts and in your academic research this universal character, so valuable in our divided world that so much exalts the special feature of an individual, group, race or nation, sometimes, to the point of injuring the obligation of solidarity.

Violence, terrorism, and war only build new walls between peoples. Your university is a training ground of universality, in which it must be possible to breathe that sense of profound communion that defined the early Christian community (cf. Acts 4,32).

4. Last year, we solemnly observed in common the 10th anniversary of the Encyclical *Redemptoris missio*. This document should be a programme of study and of life. In it I spoke of the mission that is still just beginning after 2,000 years of Christian life (n. 30). The mission is an obligation that continues today: this is the spirit that should animate your spiritual and academic life.

Today in a special way, this spirit must include the developing careful study of the cultures of the peoples of the world and of the great world religions. Without ceasing to affirm the force of the evangelical message, today in our divided world, it is an important role for Christians to be persons of dialogue who oppose the clash of civilizations that sometimes seems inevitable.

For this reason, looking toward the future, my wish would be that the Urban University be distinguished among the Roman universities for the special attention it shows to the cultures of the peoples and the great world religions, starting with Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism, and, consequently, would carefully examine the problem of interreligious dialogue with its theological, Christological and ecclesiological implications. I know already that you are intensely engaged in

this area of research, collaborating with the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, in the spirit of the Encyclical *Redemptoris missio*.

5. Finally, I urge you not to forget that the goal of the Urban College, from whom you were born as a university, is the integral formation of its students. The Church of the third millennium needs priests, religious and laity who are holy and learned. "It is not a matter of inventing a "new programme" as I wrote in *Novo Millennio ineunte*: "the programme already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its centre in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfilment in the heavenly Jerusalem" (n. 29).

This plan applies to all, and also to you, teachers and students of the Pontifical Urban University, the Urban College and the colleges that depend on the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. May the Lord be the heart of your study and of your lives, so that you will be impelled by that love for the Gospel which took the earliest witnesses to the far ends of the earth.

As I wish you an abundantly fruitful Jubilee Year for you and all who are close to you with their friendship and support, I entrust you to the protection of the Virgin Mary, Seat of Wisdom, and cordially bless you all.