



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO A DELEGATION OF THE THEOLOGICAL FACULTY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TÜBINGEN IN GERMANY**

Paul VI Audience Hall

Wednesday, 21 March 2007

Dear Bishop, esteemed Dean, distinguished Colleagues, if I may be permitted to call you such!

I thank you for this visit and I can say that it makes me deeply happy.

On the one hand, an encounter with one's past is always beautiful because there is something rejuvenating about it. On the other, however, it is something more than a nostalgic meeting.

You yourself, Your Excellency, said that it is also a sign: a sign on the one hand of how dear to me theology is - and how could it be otherwise? -, because I had considered teaching to be my true vocation, even if the Good Lord suddenly wanted something else.

At the same time, however, it is also a sign on your part, that is, that you see the interior unity between theological research, doctrine and theological work, and pastoral service in the Church, and thus the total ecclesial commitment for the human being, for the world and for our future.

Yesterday evening, of course, I started rummaging among my memories with a view to this meeting. So it was that a memory came to mind which fits in with what you have just said, Mr Dean: in other words, the memory of the Grand Senate. I do not know today whether all the appointments still pass through the Grand Senate.

It was very interesting that when, for example, a chair of mathematics or Assyriology or the physics of solid bodies or any other subject was to be assigned, the contribution from the other faculties was minimal, and everything was resolved quite quickly because almost no one dared to speak out. The situation in the humanistic disciplines was rather different and when the chairs of

theology came up in both faculties, in the end, everyone had their say.

Thus, it was evident that all the professors of the University felt in some way competent in theology; they had the feeling that they could and should participate in the decision. Theology was obviously very dear to them.

Consequently, on the one hand it could be perceived that their colleagues in the other faculties in a certain way considered that theology was the heart of the University, and on the other, that theology was precisely something that concerned everyone, in which all felt involved and somehow also knew that they were competent.

In other words, come to think of it, this means that precisely in the debate concerning the chairs of theology, the University could be experienced as a university. I am pleased to learn that these cooptations exist today, more than in the past, although Tübingen has always striven for this.

I do not know whether the *Leibniz-Kolleg* of which I was a member still exists; in any case, the modern University runs a considerable risk of becoming, as it were, a complex of advanced study institutes externally and institutionally united rather than being able to create the interior unity of *universitas*.

Theology was evidently something in which the universitas was present and in which it was demonstrated that the whole forms a unit, and that precisely at its root are a common questioning, a common task, a common purpose.

I think, moreover, that one can see in this a deep appreciation of theology. I consider this a particularly important fact.

It reveals that in our time - at least in the Latin countries where the secularity of the State and State institutions is emphasized to the extreme and therefore the omission of all that has to do with the Church, Christianity and faith is demanded - interconnections exist from which it is impossible to separate that complex reality which we call theology (which is also fundamentally linked with the Church, faith and Christianity).

It thus becomes evident in our collection of European situations - however secular, in a certain perspective, they are and must be - that Christian thought with its questions and answers is present and accompanies them.

I maintain, on the one hand, that this fact shows that theology itself continues in a certain way to make its contribution and to constitute what the University is.

But on the other, it naturally also implies an immense challenge to theology to satisfy this

expectation, to be equal to it and to carry out the service entrusted to it and expected of it.

I am pleased that through the cooptations which have now become visible in a rather practical way - far more than they used to be - that the intra-university debate makes the University truly what it is, involving it in a collective self-questioning and responding.

However, I think that this is also a reason to reflect on how far we are able - not only in Tübingen but also elsewhere - to satisfy this need. The University and society, humanity, in fact, need questions, but they also need answers. And I hold that in this regard there emerges for theology - and not only for theology - a certain dialectic between scientific rigour and the greatest question that transcends it and constantly emerges from it: the question about truth.

I would like to make this clearer with an example. An exegete, an interpreter of Sacred Scripture, must explain it as a historical work "secundum artem", that is, with the scientific rigour that we know in accordance with all the historical elements that require it and with the necessary methodology.

This alone, however, does not suffice for him to be a theologian. If he were to limit himself to doing this, then theology, or at any rate the interpretation of the Bible, would be something similar to Egyptology or Assyriology, or any other specialization.

To be a theologian and to carry out this service for the University, and I dare to say for humanity - hence, the service that is expected of him -, he must go further and ask: but is what is said there true? And if it is true, does it concern us? And how does it concern us? And how can we recognize that it is true and concerns us?

In my opinion, in this regard, even in the scientific context, theology is always also requested and called into question over and above the scientific perspective.

The University and humanity are in need of questions. Whenever questions are no longer asked, even those that concern the essential and go beyond any specialization, we no longer receive answers, either.

Only if we ask, and if with our questions we are radical, as radical as theology must be radical over and above any specialization, can we hope to obtain answers to these fundamental questions which concern us all.

First of all, we have to ask questions. Those who do not ask do not get a reply.

But I would add that for theology, in addition to the courage to ask, we also need the humility to listen to the answers that the Christian faith gives us; the humility to perceive in these answers their reasonableness and thus to make them newly accessible to our time and to ourselves.

Thus, not only is the University built up but also humanity is helped to live. For this task, I invoke God's Blessing upon you.

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