



The Holy See

VISIT TO THE UNIVERSITY OF ROME "TOR VERGATA"

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II

Thursday, 29 April 1999

Rector Finazzi Agrò,

Distinguished Guests and Teachers,

Dear Technical and Administrative Staff,

Dear Students,

1. I am very pleased to be with you today and I thank the Lord for offering me the opportunity to make this visit to your University of Rome 'Tor Vergata'. Every occasion I have to meet the university world reminds me of my personal experience as a student here in Rome and my work as a teacher at the Universities of Lublin and Kraków.

I therefore extend a very warm greeting to you, dear teachers, young students and the technical and administrative staff. I thank the Rector, the Governor of the Bank of Italy and the young student who addressed me with kind words of welcome. I extend a respectful greeting to the Cardinal Vicar, the Minister for Universities and Scientific Research, the rectors of the Roman universities and the religious and civil authorities who have wished to attend this significant event.

2. "*Blessed is the man who meditates on wisdom*" (Sir 14:20). The words we have just heard from the Book of Sirach show the principal way that the university becomes a community of teachers and students. Intellectual work, inspired by that *gaudium de veritate* of which St Augustine speaks ardently in his *Confessions* (cf. X, 23), places at the centre of speculative work the truth about the whole man. The humanistic dimension, in which the person is understood as the subject and goal, is the basis for the educational and cultural role of universities, because, as I said to UNESCO on 2 June 1980, "*the primary and essential task of culture in general, and also of all culture, is education*" (*L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 23 June 1980, p. 10).

Therefore genuine humanism does not make man alien or antagonistic to God. On the contrary,

by opening himself to the divine mystery, the true humanist finds scope for his own freedom, the enthusiasm of a search whose bounds are the true, the beautiful and the good, the elements of an irreplaceable formative influence at the service of genuine cultural progress.

The scientific conferences some of which have also been organized by your university and have been planned around the theme: "*The university for a new humanism*", correspond well to this vision. I fervently hope that they will be fitting occasions for a broadening of scientific knowledge, and, at the same time, for dialogue and discussion between teachers and students on these topics of great human and spiritual interest. Along these lines we find the *Jubilee of University Teachers*, which is being prepared with great diligence. The celebration of the Great Jubilee, some of whose most important events will be held on this university campus, including *World Youth Day*, which will take place not far from this institution, will be a unique occasion for an in-depth renewal of the horizons of research in every field of human knowledge.

3. "*Blessed is the man who meditates on wisdom*". The sacred author points to wisdom and intelligence as gifts of God and constant achievements of the human person. The vast field of culture is fertile soil for discussion and for consideration of the person and the requirements of the common good. It is a training-ground for missionary activity and evangelization.

How can we not think here of the *City Mission* in the living and working environments, which involves the whole Diocese of Rome? I know that in the context of this important pastoral initiative, many meetings of catechesis and cultural reflection have been held at your university. I also know that you are working with great generosity to give a new impetus to university ministry, considering it a privileged opportunity for the Christian-oriented cultural project to which the Church in Italy has been devoting her attention for several years.

In this perspective, the *university chaplaincy*, dedicated to the spiritual care of individuals and groups, assumes its proper role as a pastoral centre: this task entails closer and more active collaboration between the cultural components of the university community and the various experiences of the university's ecclesial groups.

The symbol and focus of your pastoral activity is the chapel, which is being erected at the heart of the university campus and which you have wished to dedicate to St Thomas Aquinas. With his open intelligence and passion for truth, this saint was able to grasp "the harmony which exists between reason and faith" (*Fides et ratio*, n. 43). "When a man's will is ready to believe", he writes, "he loves the truth he believes, he thinks out and takes to heart whatever reasons he can find in support of it" (*Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 2, a. 10). It is not a question of basing faith on reason, or of subordinating one to the other, but of illuminating reason with the light of faith. University culture also has need of this light.

4. I am grateful to those who have encouraged and supported the efforts to build this chapel set in

the complex of university buildings like a bright lamp that "gives light to all in the house" (Mt 5:15).

As I reminded the university chaplains of Europe last year, the chapel - every university chapel - is *a place of the spirit*, where believers, involved in different aspects of the university's busy life, can pause for prayer and find nourishment and direction. It is *a training-ground for Christian virtues*, where the life received in Baptism grows and develops, and is expressed with apostolic zeal. It is a welcoming and open home for all those who, heeding the voice of the Teacher within, become seekers of truth and serve mankind by their daily commitment to a knowledge that goes beyond narrow and pragmatic goals.

Your chapel is called to be a *vital centre for promoting the Christian renewal of culture*. In a few minutes, therefore, I will be delighted to bless the chalice, the bell and the statue of Our Lady Queen of the Apostles, which have been prepared for it. I also thank you for the gift of two ambulances to be used in the humanitarian mission for the refugees from Kosovo. Along with the effective solidarity you have expressed for those suffering the consequences of this sorrowful conflict, I offer the fervent wish that the war will end as soon as possible and that the clash of arms will give way to dialogue and peace. I entrust these wishes to your prayers as well.

Lastly, in memory of our meeting, I would like to repeat the invitation we heard from St Thomas Aquinas: "If you are looking for where to go, follow Christ, because he is the truth.... If you are looking for where to stay, stay with Christ, because he is the life.... Therefore follow Christ if you want to be secure. You will never be lost, because he is the way".

May it be so for each of you, whom I entrust to the motherly protection of Mary, Seat of Wisdom.

I cordially bless you all.