



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO THOSE TAKING PART IN THE EUROPEAN SYMPOSIUM ON  
THE THEME "THE UNIVERSITY AND THE CHURCH IN EUROPE"**

*Castel Gandolfo*

*Saturday, 19 July 2003*

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,  
Distinguished Rectors and Professors,  
Dear Young University Students,*

1. I am delighted to welcome you on the occasion of the Symposium "*The University and the Church in Europe*", organized by the Council of European Episcopal Conferences and the Italian Episcopal Commission for Universities, in collaboration with the Ministry for Universities. I cordially thank Bishop Amédée Grab for his words of introduction to this meeting, and the civil and academic Authorities for their appreciated presence. To all, teachers, chaplains and students, I address my cordial greeting.

You are meeting in Rome to celebrate the seventh centenary of the oldest university in the City, "La Sapienza". From Rome, your gaze has broadened in these days to the whole of Europe, in order to reflect on the relationship between the university and the Church at the beginning of the third millennium.

2. This relationship leads us directly *to the heart of Europe*, where *civilization* has succeeded in expressing itself in *one of its most emblematic institutions*. We are in the 13th and 14th centuries: the period in which "Humanism" was taking shape as a successful synthesis between theological and philosophical knowledge and the other sciences. This synthesis *would have been unthinkable without Christianity* and hence, without the age-old work of *evangelization* carried out by the Church in her encounter with the multiple ethnic and cultural realities of the continent (cf. *Address to the Fifth Symposium of the European Bishops*, 19 December 1978, n. 3).

This *remembrance of history* is indispensable in order to build the cultural perspective of the *Europe of today and in the future*, in whose construction the university is called to play an irreplaceable role.

Just as the new Europe cannot develop without drawing from its own roots, the same can be said of the university. Indeed, it is the place *par excellence* in which to seek the truth and make accurate analyses of phenomena, striving constantly to find more complete and fruitful syntheses. And just as Europe cannot be reduced to a market, so the university cannot be subjected to the requirements of the social and economic fabric, although it must be an integral part of them, on pain of losing its own predominantly cultural profile.

3. So it is that the Church in Europe looks to the university: even with esteem and confidence, doing her utmost to offer her own multiform contribution. First of all, with *the presence of teachers and students* who know how to combine competence and scientific rigour with an intense spiritual life, so as to imbue the university environment with a Gospel spirit. Secondly, through *Catholic universities*, which carry on the heritage of the ancient universities, born *from the heart of the Church (ex corde Ecclesiae)*. I would also like to reaffirm the importance of the so-called "*cultural laboratories*", which are appropriately a priority choice of university ministry on the European level. A constructive dialogue is engaged in them between faith and culture, between science, philosophy and theology, and ethics is seen as an intrinsic requirement of research for an authentic service to the human being (cf. [\*Address at the World Meeting of University Teachers for Their Jubilee\*](#), 9 September 2000, n. 5; *ORE*, 13 September 2000, p. 2).

To you, Professors, goes my encouragement; to you, students, the exhortation to make your talents fruitful with hard work; to all, the hope that you will always collaborate in the promotion of life and the dignity of man.

I will soon be lighting the torch that a relay team will take to the Church of Sant'Ivo alla Sapienza, passing by the headquarters of the various universities in Rome: this is one way to emphasize the importance and value of the seventh centenary of "La Sapienza" University.

May Mary Most Holy, Seat of Wisdom, always watch over you. I accompany you with prayers and my Blessing.

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*The Holy Father ended by greeting those present in French, English, German, Spanish and Polish. In English he said:*

I offer warm greetings to the English-language participants, and I encourage them to promote in their Universities the study of Europe's Christian roots.

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