



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS AT THE SIXTH EUROPEAN SYMPOSIUM
FOR UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS***

Clementine Hall

Saturday, 7 June 2008

*Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Illustrious Professors,*

For me it is a motive of profound joy to meet you on the occasion of the Sixth European Symposium for University Professors on the theme: "Widen the horizons of rationality. Perspectives for Philosophy" promoted by the Professors of the Universities of Rome and organized by the Office for Campus Ministry of the Vicariate of Rome in collaboration with the regional and provincial Institutions and the Municipality of Rome. I thank Cardinal Camillo Ruini and Prof. Cesare Mirabelli who have interpreted your sentiments, and I address my cordial welcome to all those present.

In continuity with last year's European meeting of university Lecturers, your Symposium takes up a very important academic and cultural theme. I would like to express my gratitude to the organizing committee for this choice which permits us, among other things, to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the publication of the Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* of my beloved Predecessor Pope John Paul II. Already on that occasion 50 civil and ecclesial philosophy professors of the public and pontifical universities of Rome manifested their gratitude to the Pope with a declaration which confirmed the urgency of relaunching the study of philosophy in universities and schools. Sharing this concern and encouraging fruitful collaboration among the professors of various Roman and European athenaeums, I wish to address a particular invitation to philosophy professors to continue with confidence in philosophical research, investing intellectual energy and involving new generations in this task.

The events which took place in the last 10 years since the Encyclical's publication have further delineated the historical and cultural scene in which philosophical research is called to enter. Indeed, the crisis of modernity is not synonymous with the decline in philosophy; instead philosophy must commit itself to a new path of research to comprehend the true nature of this crisis (cf. *Address to European Meeting of University Lecturers*, 23 June 2007) and to identify new prospectives toward which to be oriented. Modernity, if well understood, reveals an "anthropological question" that presents itself in a much more complex and articulated way than what has taken place in the philosophical reflections of the last centuries, above all in Europe. Without diminishing the attempts made, much still remains to be probed and understood. Modernity is not simply a cultural phenomenon, historically dated; in reality it implies a new planning, a more exact understanding of human nature. It is not difficult to gather from the writings of authoritative thinkers an honest reflection on the difficulties that arise in the resolution of this prolonged crisis. Giving credit to some authors' proposals in regard to religions and in particular to Christianity, is an evident sign of the sincere desire to exist from the self-sufficiency of philosophical reflection.

From the beginning of my Pontificate I have listened attentively to the requests that reach me from the men and women of our time and, in view of their expectations, I have wished to offer a pointer for research that seems to me capable of raising interest to relaunch philosophy and its irreplaceable role in the academic and cultural world. You have made it the object of reflection of your Symposium: it is the proposal to "widen the horizons of rationality". This allows me to reflect on it with you as among friends who desire to pursue a common journey. I would like to begin with a deep conviction which I have expressed many times: "Christian faith has made its clear choice: against the gods of religion for the God of philosophers, in other words against the myth of mere custom for the truth of being" (cf. J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, Ch. 3). This affirmation, that reflects the Christian journey from its dawning, shows itself completely actual in the cultural historical context that we are living. In fact, only beginning from this premise, which is historic and theological at the same time, is it possible to meet the new expectations of philosophical reflection. The risk that religion, even Christianity, be strumentalized as a surreptitious phenomenon is very concrete even today.

But Christianity, as I recalled in the Encyclical *Spe Salvi*, is not only "informative", but "performative" (cf. n. 2). This means that from the beginning Christian faith cannot be enclosed within an abstract world of theories, but it must descend into the concrete historic experience that reaches humanity in the most profound truth of his existence. This experience, conditioned by new cultural and ideological situations, is the place in which theological research must evaluate and upon which it is urgent to initiate a fruitful dialogue with philosophy. The understanding of Christianity as a real transformation of human existence, if on the one hand it impels theological reflection to a new approach in regard to religion, on the other, it encourages it not to lose confidence in being able to know reality. The proposal to "widen the horizons of rationality", therefore, must not simply be counted among the new lines of theological and philosophical

thought, but it must be understood as the requisite for a *new opening* onto the reality that the human person in his uni-totality is, rising above ancient prejudices and reductionisms, to open itself also to the way toward a true understanding of modernity. Humanity's desire for fullness cannot be disregarded. The Christian faith is called to take on this historical emergency by involving the men and women of good will in a simple task. The new dialogue between faith and reason, required today, cannot happen in the terms and in the ways in which it happened in the past. If it does not want to be reduced to a sterile intellectual exercise, it must begin from the present concrete situation of humanity and upon this develop a reflection that draws from the ontological-metaphysical truth.

Dear friends, you have before you a very exacting journey. First of all, it is necessary to promote high-level academic centres in which philosophy can dialogue with other disciplines, in particular with theology, favouring new, suitable cultural syntheses to orient society's journey. The European dimension of your meeting in Rome - indeed, you come from 26 countries - can favour a truly fruitful comparison and exchange. I trust that the Catholic academic institutions are ready to open true cultural laboratories. I would also like to invite you to encourage youth to engage in philosophical studies, opportunely favouring initiatives with a university orientation. I am certain that the new generations, with their enthusiasm, will know how to respond generously to the expectations of the Church and society.

In a few days I will have the joy of opening the Pauline Year, during which we will celebrate the Apostle to the Gentiles: I hope that this unique initiative constitutes for all of you an opportune occasion to rediscover, in the footsteps of the great Apostle, the historic fecundity of the Gospel and its extraordinary potentiality for contemporary culture too. With this wish, I impart my Blessing to you all.

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