



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE FIFTH SUMMER SCHOOL IN ASTROPHYSICS SPONSORED BY
THE VATICAN OBSERVATORY**

Friday, 7 July 1995

Dear Young Scholars,

1. I am pleased to greet the participants in the fifth *Summer School in Astrophysics sponsored by the Vatican Observatory*. I am sure that the weeks you have spent at Castel Gandolfo will prove to be an unforgettable experience, and that your differences in cultural and national background will help you to appreciate both the diversity of the members of the human family and their fundamental affinity when knowledge and truth are pursued with integrity and generosity. I welcome you today and offer you my prayerful best wishes for your future scientific work.

2. There is no doubt that the *search for scientific understanding is intimately connected with the betterment of mankind*. The quest for truth, beauty and the good, whether in the world of the arts or science, or in the efforts of those who strive to improve the social, economic and political conditions of people, leads to the realization that the true, the beautiful and the good are essentially one. In fact, it is precisely when the pursuit of the good of peoples is separated from what is true and beautiful that aberrations occur in the social fabric of societies. One such aberration is the idea that the economic good of peoples represents the highest goal to be achieved.

We have all witnessed the failure of such a limited view of human aspirations.

I remind you, then, that your scientific research, even if regarding matters far removed from daily human concerns, has importance and relevance for everyone, especially when it contributes to that vision of reality which leads to an understanding of the human person as an integral element in the physical universe.

The *integration of an understanding of ourselves and the universe* requires that we be open to the

many different channels through which we come to knowledge: the sciences, the arts, literature, philosophy, theology. In this context your scientific research is of greatest benefit to humanity when it helps to synthesize and consolidate the knowledge derived from all these other sources, and when it enables you as scientists to enter into a true and honest dialogue with these other disciplines.

3. From the very beginning of my service in the See of Peter, I have sought to *promote this dialogue and to remove obstacles which might impede its development*. Speaking to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in November of 1979, on the occasion of the commemoration of the centenary of the birth of Albert Einstein, I called for a scholarly and scientific review of the history of the Copernican–Ptolemaic controversies of the seventeenth century so that we might "honour the truth of faith and of science and open the door to future collaboration" (John Paul II, *Address in Commemoration of the Birth of Albert Einstein*, 6 [10 Nov. 1979]) . Thus emphasis was placed on looking to the future, but with honest knowledge of the past. This task is immense and calls for dedication on the part of both the Church and the scientific community.

On the occasion of the three hundredth anniversary of the publication of Newton's *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, the Holy See sponsored a Study Week investigating the multiple relationships among theology, philosophy and the natural sciences. As the papers presented during that Study Week were being prepared for publication, I sent a written Message to the Director of the Vatican Observatory in which I reviewed the status of the dialogue between the Church and the scientific community. In that Message, I noted that, in the relationship between religion and science, "there has been a definite, though still fragile and provisional, movement towards a new and more nuanced interchange. We have begun to talk to one another on deeper levels than before, and with greater openness towards one another's perspectives... In so doing we have uncovered important questions which concern both of us, and which are vital to the larger human community we both serve. It is crucial that this common search based on critical openness and interchange should not only continue but also grow and deepen in its quality and scope" (John Paul II, *Letter to Father George V. Coyne, Director of the Vatican Observatory*, 1 June 1988).

4. To you young scientists belongs the future of this dialogue: I urge you to carry it forward with sincerity and humility. Strive for excellence in your scientific endeavours, and keep your minds and hearts ever open to the different channels which lead us to a better understanding of ourselves and the universe in which we live.

May God, whose infinite love and wisdom fashioned the heavens and established the moon and stars (cf. Ps. 8:3), ever guide you into his grace and peace.

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