



The Holy See

HOLY FATHER'S ADDRESS TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN A WORLD MEETING ON PASTORAL MINISTRY IN UNIVERSITY LIFE

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Brothers and Sisters!*

1. This special audience, on the occasion of the world meeting of those entrusted by Episcopal Conferences with responsibility for university chaplaincies, is a joy for me since it affords me an opportunity, among other things, to express my keen appreciation of the work you are doing in the universities of your respective nations. I greet Cardinal Pio Laghi, whom I thank for his noble expression of the sentiments you all share. I also greet Cardinal Paul Poupard and the other prelates here, along with the academic authorities present. And I extend my greetings to all of you who devote your energies to such an important sphere as the university world.

This world meeting is certainly a worthwhile enrichment for you all, since it allows you to have a profitable exchange of experiences at the level of the local Churches. It also gives you the opportunity to work together on preparing the Jubilee for university students, which next year will bring to Rome numerous representatives of universities and scholastic institutes from every part of the world.

I know you are preparing for this event with commitment and dedication. In this regard, I wish to express my great pleasure with the booklet compiled by the Congregation for Catholic Education, together with the Pontifical Council for Culture and the Diocese of Rome, to awaken the interest of university students in the Great Jubilee and to prepare them for it. I entrust it to you and to all who work in university chaplaincies: it offers themes for reflection and practical suggestions which will find a creative response on each local scene, in order to converge again, with joy and enthusiasm, in the common celebration of the World Youth Day and, especially, in the Jubilee for university teachers next year.

2. The theme you have chosen - the university for a new humanism - is boldly situated at the critical point where the dynamics of knowledge intersect with the word of the Gospel. I am sure that, entrusted to your care and to that of Catholic and ecclesiastical universities, it will not fail to bear abundant fruit. It is your intention to involve the whole university community in its various composite dimensions (students, teachers, administrative personnel) and in its specific nature as a privileged place for fostering and transmitting culture: the Gospel is the basis for a conception of the world and of man that continually bears cultural, humanistic and ethic values which can influence one's entire view of life and history.

This confirms the university's primary vocation, sometimes jeopardized by distracting and pragmatic pressures: to be a place rich in formation and *humanitas*, serving the quality of life according to the integral truth about man on his journey through history. It is a culture of man and for man, which is spread and invigorated in the various fields of knowledge, in the ways and forms of morality, in the correct and harmonious ordering of society.

In this regard there are many problems that must be faced by university chaplaincies in their daily activity. New problems have appeared following the profound changes that have occurred in these final years of the millennium. At their root lies the constant challenge posed by the relationship between faith and reason, between faith and culture, between faith and scientific progress. In the university setting, the appearance of new knowledge and new cultural currents is always tied, directly or indirectly, to the great questions about man, about the meaning of his existence and action, about the value of conscience and the interpretation of freedom. This is why the priority task for Catholic intellectuals is to promote a renewed and vital synthesis between faith and culture, without ever forgetting that in their multifaceted educational activity the central reference-point remains Christ, the one Saviour of the world.

3. Dear brothers and sisters, proclaim by your life and your work the great news: "*Ecce natus est nobis Salvator mundi!*" This mystery is the very centre of the Jubilee celebration, which invites every believer to become a tireless messenger of this joyful truth.

To fulfil this apostolic task, however, he must let himself be docilely guided by the divine Word. This is inferred from St Paul's apostolic legacy to the elders of Ephesus: "I commend you", he said, "to God and to the Word of his grace" (*Acts* 20: 32). The Apostle commends the elders to the Word, convinced that they, before being bearers of the Word, have been borne by the Word of God. This is precisely because the Word is powerful and effective. As something living and active (*Heb* 4: 12), it has the power to save souls (*Jas* 1: 21), to grant an inheritance among all who are sanctified (*Acts* 20: 32), to impart the wisdom that leads to salvation (*2 Tm* 3: 15, 17), because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who has faith (*Rom* 1: 16).

In this connection, the Second Vatican Council states that the Gospel has the power continually to renew life and culture, to purify and elevate them (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 58). We should not be

discouraged when we see how inadequate our own forces are in relation to the problems we face. This was the drama St Paul lived, but, knowing the power of the Gospel, he told the Corinthians: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor 4: 7).

4. The aim of every apostolic effort in a university setting must be to enable young people, teachers and everyone who works in the academic world to meet Christ personally.

To this end, the specific service of a university ministry, which is committed to encouraging and coordinating these various ecclesial realities active in this field, proves very useful: from chaplaincies to the colleges, from parish groups to faculty groups. The horizons for the evangelization of culture, in fact, cannot be restricted to the confines of the university campus. It permeates all the Church's activity and becomes more effective the more it is integrated into an organized pastoral ministry.

In this framework, it is desirable that a chaplaincy, the heart of university ministry, be set up at every university. It should be the driving force of formation and of the specific cultural programmes for evangelization. Its task will be to foster a frank and open dialogue with the various components of the university, offering suitable paths for seeking a personal encounter with Christ.

It will also be useful to promote significant initiatives at the national level, such as a committee on university ministry within the Episcopal Conference and a University Day, organized as a time of prayer, reflection and planning. As has already occurred on the European level, it would be beneficial to set up ways to coordinate the chaplains on every continent, in collaboration with the pastoral offices of the Episcopal Conferences, in order to strengthen cooperation between the manifold resources of the local programmes.

5. The Church invites you, dear brothers and sisters, to be evangelizers of culture. The believer, enlightened and guided by the Word of God, is not afraid to confront human thought. On the contrary, he embraces it as his own, in the certainty of the transcendence of revealed truth, which enlightens and makes the most of human effort. Wisdom and truth come from God: wherever there is an effort to reflect honestly, wherever there is unbiased passion for the truth, a way is already open to Christ, the Saviour of mankind.

Dear brothers and sisters, be convinced that you are not alone in this demanding missionary task. Christ is walking with you! Therefore, courageously proclaim him and bear witness to him: this message has the strength and the power to stir and astonish those who hear it, moving them to make a personal decision in its regard (cf. Lk 2: 34-35).

I invoke the protection of Mary, *Sedes Sapientiae*, on you, on your university communities and on everyone you meet in your daily ministry, and, as I assure you of a special remembrance in my

prayer, I cordially impart to you my affectionate Blessing.

Castel Gandolfo, 25 september 1999

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