



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS PAUL VI
TO THE ORGANIZERS AND MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON THE
RESURRECTION OF CHRIST**

Saturday, 4 April 1970

We are most touched by the affectionate and confident words which Rev. P. Dhanis speaks to Us in your name, and We thank the Lord for this meeting, which He allows us to have with specialists highly-qualified in exegesis, theology and philosophy, who have come (to Rome) to share fraternally their researches upon the mystery of the Resurrection of Christ.

Yes, We rejoice very much in this symposium, which has been facilitated by the warm hospitality of the Institut Saint-Dominique on Via Cassia. We congratulate the organizers and all the members, whom We here receive most heartily, happy to express to them Our high esteem, Our particular good-will and Our most lively encouragement.

In response to your expectations, We wish to share with you, in all simplicity, some thoughts that are suggested to Us by the central theme of the Resurrection of Jesus, which you have so happily chosen as the object of your work.

1) Is it necessary to begin by showing you the radical importance which, like all Our Christian sons and brothers, We attach to this study? And, We dare to say, the importance is still greater for Us, in the light of the position which the Lord has given Us in His Church - as privileged witness and guardian of the faith. Of this you are probably all well aware!

Is not all the Gospel-history centred on the Resurrection? Without this, what would the Gospels themselves be, those Gospels which announce "the Good News of the Lord Jesus"? Do we not find there the source of all Christian preaching? (cf. Acts 2:32).

Does it not always remain the fulcrum of the whole epistemology of the faith, which without it

would lose its consistence - as the Apostle Paul himself says: "If Christ be not risen... our faith is void" (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-4).

Is it not this same Resurrection - which alone gives meaning - to all the Liturgy, to our "Eucharists", assuring us of the presence of the Risen Christ, Whom we celebrate amid thanksgiving: "We proclaim your death, O Lord Jesus; we celebrate your Resurrection; we look forward to your return in glory" (Anamnesis).

Yes, all Christian hope is based on the Resurrection of Christ, upon which is "anchored" our own resurrection along with Him. Indeed, even now we are risen with Him (cf. Col. 3:1) - the whole fabric of our Christian Life is woven through with this unfailing certainty and this hidden reality, along with the joy and dynamism which they produce.

2) So it is not surprising that such a mystery, so fundamental for our faith, so prodigious for our intelligence, has always aroused during the march of history not only the passionate interest of exegetes, but also a multiform contestation. This phenomenon was already evident even during the lifetime of the evangelist, S. John, who thought it necessary to point out that the unbelieving Thomas was actually invited to touch with his hands the mark "of the nails and the blessed side of the risen "Word of Life" (cf. Jn. 20:24-29).

Is not the same thing suggested later, in the efforts of a *gnosis* everrecurring under many forms, to penetrate this mystery by means of all the resources of the human spirit, and thus to reduce the mystery to the dimensions of merely human categories? These efforts are indeed understandable, and even inevitable, but they have a fearful penchant quietly to empty of all richness and significance that which is above all a fact: the resurrection of the Saviour.

Even today - and you have certainly no need to be reminded of this - we see this tendency reveal its ultimate dramatic consequences, going so far as to deny, even among people who profess themselves Christians, the historical value of the inspired witness, or (more recently) to interpret the physical resurrection of Jesus in a way that is purely mythical, spiritual or moral. Of course We are profoundly aware of the disintegrating effect that such harmful discussions have upon many of the faithful. But - and We say this with emphasis - We regard all this without fear, since, today just as in the past, the witness of "the eleven and their companions" is capable, with the grace of the Holy Spirit, of arousing the true faith: "It is indeed true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Peter" (Lk. 24:34-35).

3) It is in these sentiments that We regard with great respect the hermeneutic and exegetical work being done upon this fundamental theme, by qualified men of science like yourselves. Your attitude is conformed to the principles and norms which the Catholic Church has established for biblical studies. Let it suffice for Us to recall here the well-known encyclicals of Our predecessors. "[Providentissimus Deus](#)" of Leo XIII (1893) and "[Divino Afflante Spiritu](#)" of Pius XII (1943), as well

as the recent Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* of Vatican II. Not only a healthy liberty of research is recognized, but also one finds recommended that effort which is needed in order to adapt the study of Sacred Scripture to the needs of today, and to “truly discover that which the sacred author willed to affirm” (*Dei Verbum*, 12).

Such a perspective retains the attention of the world of culture, and is a source of new enrichments for biblical studies. We are happy that it should be so. As always, the Church appears as the jealous guardian of the written Revelation, and she shows herself animated today by a realist preoccupation: to use with discernment all knowledge and thought, in the critical interpretation of the biblical text. Thus the Church, while providing the means to know the thoughts of others, seeks to verify its own thinking and to provide occasions for meetings that are loyal and comforting for so many upright minds seeking the truth. Further, the Church herself meets with the difficulties inherent in the exegesis of difficult or doubtful texts, and she approves the utility of having diverse opinions. St. Augustine has noted: “It is useful that many opinions be found concerning the obscurities of the divine Scriptures, by which God has willed to exercise us; it is useful that some should think differently *from others*, so long as all are in harmony with sound faith and doctrine” (*Ep. ad Paulinum*, 149, n. 34, P.L. 33, 644).

And the Church, still under the guidance of St. Augustine, exhorts her sons to seek for the solutions, by study joined with prayer: “Non *solum* admonendi sunt studiosi venerabilium Litterarum, ut in Scripturis sanctis genera locutionum sciant..., verum etiam, quod est praecipuum et maxime necessarium, *orent ut intelligant*” (*De Doctrina Christiana*, III, 56: P.L. 34, 89).

4) But let Us return to the theme which is the object of your symposium. It appears to Us, for Our part, that your various analyses and reflections tend to confirm, with the help of new researches, the doctrine which the Church holds and professes as regards the Resurrection. As Romano Guardini, of happy memory, once noted in a penetrating meditation of faith, the gospel accounts underline “often and forcefully, that the Risen Christ is very different from what He was before Easter, and from the rest of men. His nature, according to the accounts, has some strange character. His approach confuses, fills with fear. Whereas previously He ‘came’ and ‘went’, now it is said that He ‘appears’, ‘suddenly’ alongside the pilgrims, that He ‘disappears’ (cf. Mk. 16:9-14; Lk. 24:31-36). No longer do corporeal barriers exist for Him. He is no longer bound by the frontiers of space and time; He moves with a new liberty, unknown upon the earth... But at the same time, it is strongly asserted that it is the same Jesus of Nazareth, in flesh and bone, just as He had lived formerly among his own, and not a mere phantom...” Yes, “the Lord is transformed. He lives differently than before. His present existence is incomprehensible to us. And yet, it is corporeal; it contains Jesus whole and entire, and even - by means of His wounds - all the life He has lived, the destiny He underwent, His Passion and His Death”. Thus, there is not simply a glorious survival of His “self”. We are in the presence of a profound and complex reality, of a new but fully human life: “The penetration and transformation of the whole life, including the body, by the presence of the Holy Spirit... We realize that change of perspective which is called faith, and which, instead of

thinking of Christ in terms of the world, thinks of the world and of all things in terms of Christ... The Resurrection brings to flower a seed which He had always borne within Him". Yes, we say again with Romano Guardini, "we need the Resurrection and the Transfiguration, in order to understand truly what the human body is... In reality, only Christianity has dared to place the body among the most hidden secrets of God" (R. Guardini, *Le Seigneur*, trad. R. P. Lorson, t. 2, Paris, Alsatia, 1945, p. 119-126).

In front of this mystery, we remain penetrated with admiration and full of wonderment, just as we feel before the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Virgin Birth (cf. Gregory the Great, *Hom. 26 in Ev.*, Breviary reading on Low Sunday). Let us then enter, with the Apostles, into that faith in the Risen Christ which alone can bring us salvation (cf. Acts 4:12).

We are also full of confidence in the security of the tradition which the Church guarantees through her Magisterium - she who encourages scientific work at the same time as she proclaims the faith of the Apostles.

My dear Sirs, these few very simple words at the end of your scholarly labours, only wish to encourage you to persevere in the same faith, never losing sight of the service of the People of God, which is entirely "regenerated by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, towards a living hope" (1 Pt. 1:3). And We, in the name, of Him: "Who was dead, and has returned to life", of that "faithful witness, the firstborn from among the dead" (Apoc. 1:5; 2:8), We grant you, from a full heart and in pledge of abundant graces for the fruitfulness of your researches, Our Apostolic Blessing.