



The Holy See

POPE JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 19 November 1997

God is the Lord of creation and history

1. The Year 2000 is now close at hand. I therefore consider it opportune to focus the Wednesday catecheses on themes which will more directly help us understand the meaning of the Jubilee, in order to live it in depth.

In the Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, I asked all the Church's members "to open their hearts to the promptings of the Spirit", to prepare to "celebrate the Jubilee with renewed faith and generous participation" (n. 59). This exhortation becomes more and more urgent with the approach of that historic date. In fact the event acts as a *watershed between the past two millenniums* and the new phase dawning for the future of the Church and of humanity.

We must prepare for it in the light of faith. Indeed, for believers the passage from the second to the third millennium is not merely a stage in the relentless march of time, but a significant occasion *to become more aware of God's plan* unfolding in the history of humanity.

2. This new cycle of catecheses aims to do precisely this. For a long time we have been conducting a systematic programme of reflections on the Creed. Our last theme was Mary in the mystery of Christ and the Church. We had previously reflected on Revelation, the Trinity, Christ and his saving work, the Holy Spirit and the Church.

At this point, the profession of faith would invite us to consider the resurrection of the body and life everlasting, which concern *the future of man and of history*. But precisely this eschatological theme coincides naturally with what has been proposed by *Tertio millennio adveniente*, which described

a path of preparation for the Jubilee *in a Trinitarian key*, planning this year to focus especially on Jesus Christ and then to move on to the year of the Holy Spirit and later to that of the Father.

In the light of the Trinity the "last things" also acquire meaning, and it is possible to understand more deeply the journey of man and history towards their *ultimate goal*: the world's return to God the Father, to whom Christ, the Son of God and Lord of history, leads us through the life-giving gift of the Holy Spirit.

3. This broad horizon of history in motion suggests several basic questions: What is time? What is its origin? What is its goal?

Indeed, as we look at Christ's birth, our attention focuses on the 2,000 years of history which separate us from that event. But our gaze also turns *to the millenniums that preceded it* and spontaneously we look back to the origins of man and the world. Contemporary science is involved in formulating hypotheses about the beginning and development of the universe. Nevertheless, what can be grasped by scientific instruments and criteria is not everything, and both faith and reason refer, beyond verifiable and measurable data, to the perspective of mystery. This perspective is indicated in the first sentence of the Bible: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gn 1:1).

Everything was created by God. Therefore nothing existed before creation except God. He is a transcendent God, who created everything by his own omnipotence, without being constrained by any necessity, by an absolutely free and gratuitous act, dictated only by love. He is God the Trinity, who reveals himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

4. In creating the universe God created time. From him comes the beginning of time, as well as all its later unfolding.

The Bible stresses that living beings depend at every moment on divine action: "When you hide your face they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your Spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the earth" (Ps 104 [103]:29-30).

Time therefore is God's gift. Continuously created by God, it is in his hands. He guides its unfolding according to his plan. Every day is a gift of divine love for us. From this standpoint, we also welcome the date of the Great Jubilee as a gift of love.

5. God is Lord of time not only as creator of the world, but also as author of the *new creation* in Christ. He intervened to heal and renew the human condition, deeply wounded by sin. He spent much time preparing his people for the splendour of the new creation, especially through the words of the prophets: "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things

shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy" (Is 65:17-18).

His promise was fulfilled 2,000 years ago with the birth of Christ. In this light, the jubilee event is an invitation to celebrate the Christian era as a period of renewal for humanity and the universe. Despite the difficulties and sufferings, the past years have been 2,000 years of grace.

The years to come, too, are in God's hands. The future of man is first of all *God's future*, in the sense that he alone knows it, prepares it and brings it about. Of course, he calls for and invites human co-operation, but he never ceases to be the transcendent "director" of history.

With this certainty we prepare for the Jubilee. Only God knows how the future will be. We know, however, that in any event it will be a future of grace; it will be the fulfilment of a divine plan of love for all humanity and for each one of us. That is why, as we look to the future, we are full of hope and are not overcome with fear. The journey to the Jubilee is a great journey of hope.

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:

Today I extend a special welcome to the staff and students of the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland, who are in Rome as part of their Graduate School programme. Dear friends, during the last few months you have had an opportunity to deepen your ecumenical commitment and responsibility. It is my hope that your visit will further encourage you to be servants of the unity for which Christ prayed on the night before he died (cf. Jn 17:21). God bless you all!

I am also pleased to greet the participants in the course organized by the NATO Defense College: may your dedicated professional efforts always be aimed at building a world of true and lasting peace.

Upon all the English-speaking visitors and pilgrims I gladly invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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