



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER

Tuesday, 16 November 1999

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Distinguished teachers and dear students,*

1. I gladly accepted the invitation to preside at the solemn opening of the academic year and to meet all those who in various ways are part of the great Lateran University family. Thank you for your warm welcome! Thank you for this renewed witness of fidelity and devotion to the Successor of Peter!

I extend my cordial greeting first of all to Cardinal Camillo Ruini, Grand Chancellor of this university. With him I greet the Cardinals and Bishops present, and the Rector Magnificent, Bishop Angelo Scola, whom I thank for his courteous words of welcome on behalf of the whole university community.

My respectful thought also extends to the ambassadors, to the rectors of the ecclesiastical and civil universities, to the rectors of the seminaries and colleges and to the sponsors and benefactors who are attending this solemn academic event.

Lastly, I would like to address you with special affection, distinguished teachers and dear students, who daily spend your energies in the exalting and demanding quest for truth. Your commitment today will benefit from the new facilities I have just blessed, the reformed statutes recently approved and the updated technical-administrative management which will provide the Pontifical Lateran University and the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family with an interconnected service network that respects the autonomy of both institutions and their

academic vocation, whose character is at once Roman and universal.

2. As we reflect on the university's origins, we find ourselves, as it were, re-reading a page of the very history of the Church which, as everybody knows, was a promoter of the most ancient European athenaeums.

In the modern era, the Enlightenment reform of the university sought to answer the essential questions about man and his destiny without considering Revelation. In many cases theology too has been more or less expelled from academic institutions after having been its centre for centuries.

However, in the current cultural context, the lessening of the exclusivist claims of reason and the noted aridity of agnostic relativism seem to draw the university's attention once again to a complete investigation of the *humanum*.

As legitimate heirs to the academic tradition of the medieval schools, "ecclesiastical" universities are called to play a leading role in this reawakening, in fruitful collaboration with the many researchers of the university world, especially the Catholic world.

3. This renewed attention to man in his intrinsic relationship with being and with the question about God opens our eyes to the tasks incumbent on the faculties and institutes of the Lateran University.

The *Theology Faculty* is called to make its own the constant striving of the *intellectus fidei* to penetrate the mystery of God ever more deeply and to present it in the "language" of today's generation.

The *Philosophy Faculty* must be in dialogue, on the one hand, with the continual development of the sciences of nature and of man, and, on the other, with the loss of a higher level of reflection, whether the philosophy of man or metaphysics (cf. *Fides et ratio*, n. 83), in order to recapitulate, order and integrate the other levels of experience and knowledge, and thus be in fruitful dialogue with faith.

The *Pontifical Institute Utriusque Iuris*, with its special scholarly character nurtured by an articulated vision of the history of law, is called to give a new foundation to the principles of the canonical and civil legal systems with the help of these "two branches" of its knowledge.

The *Pontifical Pastoral Institute Redemptor Hominis*, which for several years has been devoting special attention to the Church's social teaching, should reflect on the urgent need for effective ecclesial action to ensure that in the religious, cultural, social, political and economic spheres the central truth stressed by the Second Vatican Council may be grasped, that is, that man is "*the only*

creature on earth that God has wanted for its own sake" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 24).

Finally, I would like once again to emphasize the importance of studying God's plan for the individual, for marriage and for the family, which is being carried out at the *Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family* and which I also recalled at my recent meeting with the faculties of all its international sections (cf. *Address to participants in an International Study Week*, 27 August; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 1 September 1999, p. 4).

4. To meet these challenges, it is necessary to involve all the university's elements, including those academic institutions on the various continents which are linked in different ways to the Lateran University. Through them, your athenaeum is helping to redefine the theoretical and practical boundaries of the university in the third millennium, which is reaching out beyond the European continent to the global level. Just as the medieval *universitas* had a role in moulding European identity, so the university of the third millennium is called to develop a new awareness of membership in the whole human family of individuals and peoples.

In this task, your specific duty will be to testify how this awareness is based on Jesus Christ, who is the Alpha and the Omega, the Root and the Shoot, the Beginning and the End.

5. Dear teachers and students of the *Alma Mater Lateranensis*, which has the honour and duty of being in a special way "the Pope's university", always be concerned for the creative and dynamic unity of faith and the *intellectus fidei*. As St Anselm recalls, this unity is exposed to the tragedy of sin, on account of which "*the truth speaks clearly, yet the inner self remains unresponsive*" (*Oratio ad Sanctum Paulum*, 82-84). This knowledge must prompt us to seek an effective unity among the various pedagogical areas, through a more and more practical and cordial coordination between those in charge of your university and the teachers in seminaries and colleges, especially those in the Diocese of Rome.

With these wishes, I entrust to Mary, *Mater Ecclesiae*, to Mary, *Sedes Sapientiae*, this new academic year, which asks from each of you commitment, initiative and fidelity, in ready obedience to the "Truth" that comes from on high, guaranteed by the authentic Magisterium of the Church. The Pope supports you, accompanies you and affectionately blesses you all.