



# The Holy See

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***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO PARTICIPANTS IN A CONGRESS HELD ON THE OCCASION  
OF THE 10th ANNIVERSARY OF THE PUBLICATION  
OF POPE JOHN PAUL II'S ENCYCLICAL FIDES ET RATIO***

Clementine Hall

Thursday, 16 October 2008

*Your Eminences,  
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,  
Ladies and gentlemen,*

I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of the Congress fittingly organized on the 10th anniversary of the Encyclical *Fides et ratio*. I first thank Archbishop Rino Fisichella for his cordial words introducing today's meeting. I am glad that the study days of your Congress involve the effective collaboration of the Lateran University, the Pontifical Academy for Sciences and the World Conference of Catholic University Philosophy Institutions. Collaboration of this kind is always desirable, especially when one is called to account for one's faith in the face of ever more complex challenges that confront believers in the contemporary world.

Ten years after its publication, an attentive look at the Encyclical *Fides et ratio* enables one to perceive admiringly its lasting topicality; it reveals the farsighted depth of my unforgettable Predecessor. In fact, the Encyclical is characterized by its great openness to reason, especially in a period in which its weakness was theorized. John Paul ii, on the other hand, underlines the importance of combining faith and reason in their reciprocal relationship, yet while also respecting the sphere of autonomy of each. With this Magisterium, the Church has voiced an emerging need within the contemporary cultural context. She has chosen to defend the power of reason and its ability to attain the truth, presenting faith once again as a special form of knowledge, thanks to which we are opened to the truth of Revelation (cf. *Fides et ratio*, n. 13). We read in the Encyclical that we must trust in the abilities of human reason and not set ourselves goals that are too modest: "It is faith which stirs reason to move beyond all isolation and willingly to run risks so that

it may attain whatever is beautiful, good and true" (n. 56). Moreover, it is in the passing of time that the achievement of reason's goals, motivated by the passion for truth, are manifest. Who could deny the contribution that the great philosophical systems have made to the development of human self-awareness and the progress of various cultures? What is more, these cultures become fruitful when they are opened to the truth, enabling all those who participate in them to reach goals that make social life ever more human. The quest for the truth bears most fruit when it is sustained by love for the truth. Augustine wrote: "What one holds with the mind is held by knowing it, but no good may be known perfectly unless one loves perfectly" (*De diversis quaestionibus*, 35, 2).

Yet we cannot deny that a shift has occurred from predominantly speculative thought to that which is primarily experimental. Research has above all involved the observation of nature in the attempt to discover its secrets. The desire to know nature then became the desire to reproduce it. This transformation was far from painless; the evolution of concepts damaged the relationship between *fides* and *ratio*, resulting in each taking its own separate path. Scientific and technological breakthroughs, which *fides* is increasingly challenged to face, have modified the age-old concept of *ratio*; in a certain way they have marginalized the reason that was seeking the ultimate truth of things in order to make room for a reason content with discovering the contingent truths of the laws of nature. Scientific research undoubtedly has its positive value. The discovery of and increase in the mathematical, physical, chemical and applied sciences are the product of reason and express the intelligence with which man succeeds in penetrating the depth of creation. Faith, for its part, does not fear scientific progress and the developments to which scientific achievements lead when they are aimed towards the human being, his well-being and the progress of humanity as a whole. As the anonymous author of the Letter to Diognetus recalled: "The tree of knowledge does not kill, but disobedience kills. For there cannot be life without knowledge any more than there can be sound knowledge without genuine life, and so the two trees were planted close together" (xii, 2, 4).

Nonetheless, it happens that scientists do not always direct their research to these aims. Easy earnings or, even worse, the arrogance of replacing the Creator, at times play a decisive role. This is a form of the *hybris* of reason, which can acquire characteristics that are dangerous to humanity itself. Science, moreover, is unable to work out ethical principles; it can only accept them and recognize them as necessary to eradicate its potential pathologies. In this context, philosophy and theology become indispensable aids which must be placed alongside science in order to prevent it from proceeding on its own down a twisting path, full of unexpected accidents and not without risks. This does not mean restricting scientific research or preventing technology from producing the means for development; rather, it consists in maintaining vigilance about the sense of responsibility that reason possesses in regards to science, so that it stays on track in its service to the human being.

Augustine's lesson is still meaningful even in today's context: "What does someone who can use reason well attain other than the truth?" the holy Bishop of Hippo asks. "The truth is not obtained

by itself with reasoning but it is what those who use reason seek.... It confesses that what the truth is is not you, for it does not seek itself; you, on the other hand, have not attained it by passing from one place to another, but by seeking it with the disposition of your mind" (*De vera religione*, 39, 72). In other words, wherever the search for the truth comes from, it remains as a given that is both offered and recognizable as already present in nature. The intelligibility of creation, in fact, is not the result of the scientist's effort, but a condition offered to him to enable him to discover the truth that is present within it. "*These things are not made by the process of reasoning, but discovered*", Augustine continues in his reflection. "*Therefore they abide in themselves even before they are discovered, and once they are discovered they renew us*" (*ibid.*, 39, 73). In brief, reason must fully run its course, strong in its autonomy and its rich intellectual tradition.

Reason also understands and discovers that, in addition to what it has already attained and achieved, there exists a truth that it will never be able to discover based solely on itself, but only receive as a gift freely given. The truth of Revelation does not superimpose the truth achieved by reason; rather, it purifies and exalts reason, thereby enabling it to broaden its horizons to enter into a field of research as unfathomably expansive as mystery itself. The truth revealed, when "the time had fully come" (Gal 4: 4), assumed the Face of a person, Jesus of Nazareth, who brought the ultimate and definitive answer to the question of human meaning. The truth of Christ, since it affects every person in search of joy, happiness and meaning, far exceeds any other truth that reason can discover. It surrounds mystery, so that *fides* and *ratio* might find the real possibility of a common path.

The Synod of Bishops on the theme: "The Word of God in the life and mission of the Church", is taking place in these days. How can we fail to see the providential coincidence of this event with your Congress? Passion for the truth impels us to re-enter into our interior selves to grasp the profound meaning of our lives. True philosophy must take every person by the hand and bring them to discover how fundamental it is to their dignity to know the truth of Revelation. Before this demand for meaning, which gives no respite until it flows into Jesus Christ, the Word of God reveals his character as a definitive response: one Word of revelation that becomes life and that asks to be welcomed as an inexhaustible source of truth.

As I hope that each one of you will increasingly feel within you this passion for the truth and will do everything in your power to satisfy its demands, I would like to assure you that I am following your commitment with appreciation and pleasure, accompanying your research with my prayers. To confirm these sentiments, I willingly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you who are present here and to your loved ones.

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