



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE ADMINISTRATION, FACULTY, STUDENTS AND STAFF
OF THE PONTIFICAL GREGORIAN UNIVERSITY**

Friday, 6 April 2001

Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. I am pleased to extend my cordial welcome to you today and I thank you for this visit, which you wanted to make on the occasion of the 450th anniversary of the foundation of the Roman College, of which the Gregorian University represents the happy and providential continuation. Today's meeting is for you - teachers, students, benefactors and friends of this Roman academic centre - an occasion for confirming your fidelity to the Vicar of Christ. It offers the Pope the opportunity to express his sincere gratitude to you and to encourage you to continue your dedicated commitment to your particular mission in the Church.

I first greet Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski, your Grand Chancellor, whom I thank for expressing to me the sentiments you all share. With him I greet the Bishops who wanted to take part in this moment of joy and thanksgiving. I extend a cordial welcome to Fr Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, Superior General of the Society of Jesus and Vice-Grand Chancellor, and to the Rector Magnificent, Fr Franco Imoda. I also greet the distinguished professors, whose presence makes this meeting particularly solemn.

In a special way, finally, I wish to greet you, dear students, who addressed me through your representative, whom I also thank. With the variety of your backgrounds, you enrich the universal dimension of this "Alma Mater". In it you prepare to serve the People of God and to be attentive and courageous leaders in the life your Dioceses and of your religious families.

2. The first sentiment that stirs in my heart on such a happy occasion, is sincere and profound gratitude to the Lord for the centuries-old service that your University has rendered to the Gospel cause.

From the beginning, St Ignatius of Loyola thought of your venerable institution as a "*universitas omnium gentium*", at work in Rome, next to the Vicar of Christ, linked to him by close bonds of fidelity, and at the service of the Churches in every part of the world. He entrusted the then-Roman College with the task of promoting reasoned and systematic reflection on the faith in order to foster the correct preaching of the Gospel and the cause of Catholic unity in a social context marked by serious divisions and troubling seeds of disintegration.

From its earliest years, St Ignatius' insight turned out to be providential. As times and situations changed, the Gregorian's service, due to the presence of illustrious scholars and teachers, has become increasingly more incisive and important. At the moment it is attended by over 3,400 students from a good 130 countries, and is divided into faculties and specializations corresponding to new demands in Revelation and Catholic tradition, in a fruitful and attentive dialogue with the contemporary scientific world.

This important anniversary, then, is a fitting occasion for revisiting the road traveled, which is identified to a great extent with the history of evangelization and the defence of the Catholic faith in the last centuries.

3. Given the challenges of today's society, this is the moment for a courageous relaunching of your institution. It is the occasion for reconfirming a total fidelity to the Ignatian insight and for undertaking a courageous renewal, so that the memory of the past is not limited to contemplation of what was done before, but becomes a commitment in the present and a prophecy for the future.

The Lord, who has always guided your steps, repeats to you today: "*Duc in altum!* - Put out into the deep!". Continue - he seems to add - to be a privileged instrument for proclaiming my Gospel to the men and women of the third millennium. You can fulfil this mission, dear brothers and sisters, to the extent that you remain constantly faithful to your charism.

In fact, the specific identity of your academic centre and its structural bond with the Society of Jesus encourage you to reconfirm some basic directions, which have always guided your activity. From its foundation, your University has made its fundamental objective a "reasoned and systematic reflection on the faith", spurred by the special bond of filial obedience that links it to the Holy See and by the desire to dialogue with the cultural institutions of our time.

4. First of all, complete fidelity to the Magisterium. This is a condition that, as can be seen from your centuries-old experience, does not stifle but fosters even more the ecclesial service of theological research and of teaching.

The changed circumstances of contemporary culture require the teachers and students of your University to be equipped with a sound inner balance, a clear firmness of mind and spirit and a deep humility of heart.

Here I would like to recall what I wrote in the Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, that when we open ourselves to other areas of knowledge, it is always necessary to pay "special attention to the philosophical implications of the word of God and to be sure to reflect in [our] work all the speculative and practical breadth of the science of theology" (n. 105). For theology is constructed through constant attention to the mystery of God and to the mystery of man.

Another objective, which involves you in the front line in conformity with the "charism of service to the universal Church", characteristic of the Society of Jesus, is pastoral attention to the theme of Christian unity, to interreligious dialogue and to the study of contemporary atheism.

In today's context of a globalized world, where the co-existence of people of different faiths and cultures is more marked and frequent, interreligious dialogue acquires considerable importance, because "the name of the one God", as I wrote in the Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, "must become increasingly what it is: a name of peace and a summons to peace" (n. 55).

5. How can the Gregorian University, which has always been a "*universitas omnium gentium*", not feel strongly called to meet the challenges of the modern world? May the criterion that directs your research and your daily work always be docility to the Spirit who, on the one hand, sends the Church into the world to reconcile it to God and, on the other, inspires so many men and women of good will, prompting in them an interest in the truth (cf. *Fides et ratio*, 44).

In this effort continue to refer to the shining example of the great missionary Fr Matteo Ricci, who infused the very heart of Chinese society with his religious witness. When speaking of the Gospel, he knew in every circumstance how to find the appropriate cultural approach for his listeners.

Yes, dear brothers and sisters, your university family can count on a long history marked by a great wealth of culture and spirituality. It can also count on teachers and students who, coming from every part of the world, bring with them a variety of experiences. When all this is put at the service of the Gospel and accompanied by constant recourse to prayer, it can only bear the desired apostolic fruits for the benefit of the entire People of God. I fervently hope that you will continue your mission with genuine love for the Church and in constant harmony with the Holy See.

I entrust each of you and your institution to the heavenly protection of Mary, Mother of Wisdom, of St Ignatius and your other patron saints, and, as I assure you of a special remembrance in my prayer, I cordially give you my Blessing.

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