



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

Monday, 11 September 2000

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I extend a cordial welcome to all of you during the celebrations in Rome of the Jubilee of Universities, who represent - in such a numerous group - the community of the Jagiellonian University. I greet the distinguished professors led by the rector. I also greet the students and representatives of the administrative staff present.

As I think of the Jagiellonian University, my mind is stirred by memories - far off, even from before the war, and recent ones, such as, for example, the memory of our meeting at the Collegiate Church of St Anne and the *Collegium Maius* in 1997. The faces of the professors and students, who formed and form this university's past and present history, flash before my eyes. This reminiscing is especially justified by the fact that we are still living the spirit of the celebrations for the 600th anniversary of the Jagiellonian University and of the renewal of the *Alma Mater* of Kraków.

Today, however, as we meet in the context of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, it is necessary - preserving a vivid memory of this 600-year-old history - to reflect on the present in the perspective of the future. It seems a favourable moment - between the two millennia - to think about the role and tasks of this university, which has always given tone to the growth of knowledge and culture in Poland.

To a certain extent, I already attempted a reflection of this kind at our meeting in 1997. Starting precisely with the name *Alma Mater*, I said then that the duty of an academic institution is in a certain sense: *to give birth to souls for the sake of knowledge and wisdom*, to shape minds and hearts. This task cannot be achieved other than through a generous *service to the truth* - revealing

it and passing it on to others. I also said that this service to the truth is carried out in the social dimension as a *service of thought*, that is, the effort at an analysis of the reality of this world, which always refers to the supreme ideal of truth, goodness and beauty, and through which it can become *the voice of a critical conscience* with regard to all that threatens or belittles man. Of course, this mission entails special responsibility and demands an extraordinary *ethical sensitivity* on behalf of scholars.

Today I return to my reflection three years ago to recall the principles to which the generations which have succeeded one another at the Jagiellonian University referred. In every circumstance, and first of all in periods of danger for the homeland and the nation, these principles constituted its basis and were an inspiration in the great work of the development of this shining heritage which we remember with pride today. *These norms are still timely*. If the university is to be not only a place in which knowledge is transmitted but above all a temple of knowledge, we cannot abandon them.

In this context, taking into account the future of Poland and of Europe, I would like to point out the very concrete task presented to the academic institutions in Poland and to the Jagiellonian University in particular. It is to form a healthy spirit of patriotism in the nation. The *Alma Mater* of Kraków has always been an environment in which broad openness to the world was in harmony with a deep sense of the national identity. Here there has always been a lively knowledge that our homeland is a patrimony which does not only include a certain reserve of material goods in a given territory but, above all, is a treasure, the only one of its kind, of values and spiritual content, that is, of all that constitutes the nation's culture. One after another, generations of teachers, professors and students of the university have safeguarded this treasure and helped to build it up, even at the price of great sacrifices. In this very way they learned patriotism, that is, *love of what belongs to the homeland*, of what is the fruit of their forebears' genius and of what distinguishes one people from the others and, at the same time, is a place of encounter and creative exchange in the dimension of the human race.

Today it seems that while we observe the process of unification of the nations of Europe, which gives rise to hope but is not without danger, the Jagiellonian University should assume this tradition with particular zeal. As an exceptional environment where the nation's culture is formed, may it be a place for the formation of a patriotic spirit - of love for the homeland, which safeguards its welfare but does not close its doors; rather, may it build bridges to increase this good by sharing it with others. Poland needs enlightened patriots who are capable of sacrifices for love of their homeland and, at the same time, prepared for a creative exchange of spiritual goods with the nations of a Europe in the process of unification.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, you have come here as pilgrims of the Jubilee Year, as those who believe in the infinite love of God, who for us and for our salvation became man, died and rose again. I pray to God that your stay in the Eternal City will be a special time of consolidation in

this faith. May his light lead you and inspire you in your efforts to seek the truth, to increase goodness and to create beauty.

With this prayer, I also embrace the representatives of the Catholic University of Lublin. I am pleased that you have come here and, with your presence, may you confer an intercollegiate character on this meeting. It is true that my speech was directly addressed to the Jagiellonian University, but in its essential content it can also refer to the Catholic University of Lublin and to all of Poland's academic institutions. I ask you to take back to them my cordial greeting. God bless you all.

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