The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO CAGLIARI

MEETING WITH THE ACADEMIC AND CULTURAL WORLD

ADDRESS OF HOLY FATHER FRANCIS

Lecture Hall of the Pontifical Theological Faculty of Sardinia, Cagliari
Sunday, 22 September 2013

Dear Friends, Good afternoon!

I extend my heartfelt greetings to you all. I thank the Father President and Rectors Magnificent for their words of welcome, and I wish them every good for the work of the three institutions. I am pleased to hear that they work together as friends: this is good! I wish to thank and encourage the Pontifical Theological Faculty that is hosting us, especially the Jesuit Fathers who generously carry out their most valuable service, and the entire Academic Corps. The training of candidates for the priesthood remains a top priority, but the formation of the laity is also very important.

I do not wish to give an academic lecture, even though the context and you who are a qualified group may call for one. I prefer to offer a few thoughts aloud that come from my experience as a man and a Pastor of the Church. For this reason, I am letting myself be guided by a passage of the Gospel, by making an “existential” interpretation of the account of the disciples on the road to Emmaus: two disciples of Jesus who, after his death, leave Jerusalem and return to the village. I have chosen three key words: disappointment, resignation and hope.

The hearts of the two disciples are filled with suffering and bewilderment at the death of Jesus; they are disappointed by how things have ended. We find a similar sentiment in our present situation: disappointment, *disillusionment* as a result of an economic and financial crisis, but also of an ecological, educational, moral and human crisis. It is a crisis that concerns the present and future of the history and life of man in our western civilization and that ends in affecting the entire

world. And when I say crisis, I am not thinking of tragedy. When the Chinese want to write the word *crisis*, they write it with two characters: the character for danger and the character for opportunity. When we speak of crises, we are speaking of dangers, but also of opportunities. This is the sense in which I am using the word. Of course every age of history contains critical elements, but in the last four centuries, we have never seen the fundamental certainties that make up human life so shaken as in our time. I am thinking of the deterioration of the environment: this is dangerous, let us think ahead a little to the war over water which is to come; to social imbalances; to the terrible power of weapons — we have said so much about this in recent days—; to the economic and financial system which puts money, the god of money, rather than man at the centre rather than man; to the development and the burden of the media, with all of its positive aspects, of communications and of transportation. It is a change that concerns the very way in which humanity keeps its existence in the world going.

2. What are the reactions in the face of this reality? Let us return to the two disciples of Emmaus: disappointed at Jesus' death, they show resignation and try to flee from reality, they leave Jerusalem. We can read these same attitudes at this time in history too. In the face of this crisis, there can be *resignation*, pessimism about the possibility of taking any effective action. In a certain sense it is “calling us out” of the same dynamic as the present historical turning point, by denouncing its more negative aspects with a mindset similar to that spiritual and theological movement of the second century A.D. that was called “apocalyptic”. We are tempted to think in apocalyptic terms. This pessimistic understanding of human freedom and of the process of history leads to a kind of paralysis of mind and will. Disillusionment also leads to a kind of escapism, to looking for “islands” or a reprieve. It is something like Pilate's attitude of *“washing his hands”*. It is an attitude which appears to be “pragmatic”, but which in fact ignores the cry for justice, humanity and social responsibility and leads to individualism and hypocrisy, if not to a sort of cynicism. This is the temptation we are faced with, if we go down the road of disenchantment and disappointment.

At this point we wonder: is there a way forward in our present situation? Should we resign ourselves to it? Should we allow our hope to be dimmed? Should we flee from reality? Should we "wash our hands of it" and withdraw into ourselves? I not only think that there is a way forward, but also that the very moment in history which we are living urges us *to seek and find paths of hope* that open our society to new horizons. And this is where the role of the university is so very valuable. The university as a place for the development and transmission of knowledge, for the formation in “wisdom” in the deepest sense of the word, for the integral education of the human person. In this regard, I would like to offer several brief points of reflection.

a. *The university as a place of discernment*. It is important to interpret reality by looking it in the face. Ideological or partial interpretations are useless; they only feed illusion and disillusionment. It is important to interpret reality, but also to live this reality without fear, without fleeing, without catastrophism. Every crisis, even the present one, is a passage, the pangs of a birth that involves

struggle, hardship and suffering, but which bears within itself the new horizon of life, of a renewal, that carries the power of hope. And this is not a crisis of “change”: it is a crisis of “the change of an era”. It is an era that changes. These are not superficial changes of an era. A crisis can become a time of purification and and a time to rethink our socio-economic models and of a certain understanding of progress that fed illusions, in order to recover what is most fully human. Discernment is neither blind nor improvised: it is carried out on the basis of ethical and spiritual criteria; it involves asking oneself about what is good, it entails thinking about our own values regarding man and the world, a vision of the person in all his dimensions, especially the spiritual and transcendent; the person may never be considered “human material”! This, perhaps, is the suggestion lurking in functionalism. The University, as a place of “knowledge” has a very important role to play in forming students in discernment in order to nourish hope. When the unknown traveller, the Risen Jesus, approaches the two sad and disconsolate disciples of Emmaus, he does not try to hide the reality of the Crucifixion, of the apparent defeat that threw them into crisis. On the contrary, he invites them to interpret reality so as to to guide them to the light of His Resurrection: “O foolish men and slow of heart … Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” (Lk 24:25-26). To discern does not mean to escape, but rather to seriously interpret reality without prejudice

b. Another element: *The university as a place where the culture of closeness develops*, a culture of closeness. This is a proposal: a culture of closeness. Isolation and withdrawing into one's own interests are never the way to restore hope and bring about a renewal. Rather, it is closeness, it is the culture of encounter. Isolation, no. Closeness, yes. Culture clash, no; culture of encounter, yes. The university is a privileged place where this culture of dialogue is promoted, taught and lived, this culture which does not indiscriminately level out differences and plurality — this is one of the risks of globalization — nor does it take them to the extreme, causing them to become causes of conflict. Rather, it opens to constructive dialogue. This means understanding and esteeming someone else's riches; it means not seeing him with indifference or fear, but as an opportunity for growth. The dynamics that regulate relationships between people, groups and nations often do not involve closeness and encounter but rather conflict. I refer again to the Gospel passage. When Jesus approaches the two disciples of Emmaus he shares in their journey, he listens to their reading of reality and to their disappointment, and he talks to them. In this way, he rekindles hope in their hearts; he opens up new horizons that were already present but which only the encounter with the Risen One makes it possible to recognize. Never be afraid of encounter, of dialogue, of comparisons, between universities. At all levels. We are here at the centre of the Faculty of Theology. Allow me to say to you: do not be afraid to open yourselves likewise to the horizons of transcendence, to an encounter with Christ nor to deepen your relationship with him. Faith never restricts the space for reason; rather, it opens it to an integral vision of man and of reality and acts as a defence against the danger of reducing man to “human material”.

c. One final element: *The university as a place of formation in solidarity.* The word solidarity does not belong solely to a Christian vocabulary. It is a word that is fundamental to human vocabulary.

As I said today it is a word which in the present crisis, risks being eliminated from the dictionary. The discernment of reality, by taking on the moment of crisis, and the promotion of a culture of encounter and dialogue, orientate us to solidarity as a fundamental element for a renewal of our societies. The encounter, the dialogue between Jesus and the two disciples of Emmaus, which rekindles their hope and renews their life's journey, leads to sharing: they recognize him in the breaking of the bread. It is the sign of the Eucharist, of God who makes himself so close in Christ that he becomes a constant presence, that he shares his very life. And he says this to everyone, even to non-believers: it is precisely in solidarity unspoken yet practiced that relationships change from considering someone as “human material” or “a number” to seeing him as “a person”. There is no future for any country, for any society, for our world, unless we are able to show greater solidarity. Solidarity, then, as a way of making history, as a vital context in which conflicts, tensions, and even those who oppose one another attain a harmony that generates life. In thinking about this this reality of encounter in crisis, I have found in young politicians another way of thinking about politics. I don't say better or worse, but different. They speak differently, they are seeking ... their music is different from our music. Let us not be afraid! Let us listen to them, They have an intuition: let us open ourselves to their intuition. It is an intuition of young life. I say young politicians because this is what I have heard about, but the young in general are looking for this different key. To assist us in the encounter, it will help us to listen to the music of these young politicians, “scientists”, young thinkers.

Before I conclude, allow me to emphasize that faith itself gives us Christians a firm hope that urges us on to discern reality, and to live together in closeness and solidarity. For God himself has entered our history, by becoming man in Jesus. He has immersed himself in our weakness, by becoming close to us, by showing true solidarity, especially to the poor and the needy, by opening up before us a horizon that is infinite and sure in hope.

Dear friends, thank you for this meeting and for your attention; may hope be the light that ever illumines your study and commitment. And may courage be the musical tempo for keeping going! May the Lord bless you!

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