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Questa mattina, nell'Aula Paolo VI, il Papa ha ricevuto in Udienza i partecipanti all'Incontro dei Rettori e Docenti delle Università Europee, sul tema "Un nuovo umanesimo per l'Europa", organizzato in occasione del 50° anniversario dei Trattati di Roma.

Nel corso dell'incontro il Santo Padre Benedetto XVI ha rivolto loro il discorso che riportiamo di seguito:

● DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

Your Eminence,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends!

I am particularly pleased to receive you during the first European Meeting of University Lecturers, sponsored by the Council of European Episcopal Conferences and organized by teachers from the Roman universities, coordinated by the Vicariate of Rome's Office for the Pastoral Care of Universities. It is taking place on the

fiftieth anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, which gave rise to the present European Union, and its participants include university lecturers from every country on the continent, including those of the Caucasus: Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. I thank Cardinal Péter Erdő, President of the Council of European Episcopal Conferences, for his kind words of introduction. I greet the representatives of the Italian government, particularly those from the Ministry for Universities and Research, and from the Ministry for Italy's Cultural Heritage, as well as the representatives of the Region of Lazio and the Province and City of Rome. My greeting also goes to the other civil and religious authorities, the Rectors and the teachers of the various universities, as well as the chaplains and students present.

The theme of your meeting – *"A New Humanism for Europe. The Role of the Universities"* – invites a disciplined assessment of contemporary culture on the continent. Europe is presently experiencing a certain social instability and diffidence in the face of traditional values, yet her distinguished history and her established academic institutions have much to contribute to shaping a future of hope. The "question of man", which is central to your discussions, is essential for a correct understanding of current cultural processes. It also provides a solid point of departure for the effort of universities to create a new cultural presence and activity in the service of a more united Europe. Promoting a new humanism, in fact, requires a clear understanding of what this "newness" actually embodies. Far from being the fruit of a superficial desire for novelty, the quest for a new humanism must take serious account of the fact that Europe today is experiencing a massive cultural shift, one in which men and women are increasingly conscious of their call to be actively engaged in shaping their own history. Historically, it was in Europe that humanism developed, thanks to the fruitful interplay between the various cultures of her peoples and the Christian faith. Europe today needs to preserve and reappropriate her authentic tradition if she is to remain faithful to her vocation as the cradle of humanism.

The present cultural shift is often seen as a "challenge" to the culture of the university and Christianity itself, rather than as a "horizon" against which creative solutions can and must be found. As men and women of higher education, you are called to take part in this demanding task, which calls for sustained reflection on a number of foundational issues.

Among these, I would mention in the first place the need for a comprehensive study of the crisis of modernity. European culture in recent centuries has been powerfully conditioned by the notion of modernity. The present crisis, however, has less to do with modernity's insistence on the centrality of man and his concerns, than with the problems raised by a "humanism" that claims to build a *regnum hominis* detached from its necessary ontological foundation. A false dichotomy between theism and authentic humanism, taken to the extreme of positing an irreconcilable conflict between divine law and human freedom, has led to a situation in which humanity, for all its economic and technical advances, feels deeply threatened. As my predecessor, Pope John Paul II, stated, we need to ask "whether in the context of all this progress, man, as man, is becoming truly better, that is to say, more mature spiritually, more aware of the dignity of his humanity, more responsible and more open to others" (*Redemptor Hominis*, 15). The anthropocentrism which characterizes modernity can never be detached from an acknowledgment of the full truth about man, which includes his transcendent vocation.

A second issue involves the broadening of our understanding of rationality. A correct understanding of the challenges posed by contemporary culture, and the formulation of meaningful responses to those challenges, must take a critical approach towards narrow and ultimately irrational attempts to limit the scope of reason. The concept of reason needs instead to be "broadened" in order to be able to explore and embrace those aspects of reality which go beyond the purely empirical. This will allow for a more fruitful, complementary approach to the relationship between faith and reason. The rise of the European universities was fostered by the conviction that faith and reason are meant to cooperate in the search for truth, each respecting the nature and legitimate autonomy of the other, yet working together harmoniously and creatively to serve the fulfilment of the human person in truth and love.

A third issue needing to be investigated concerns the nature of the contribution which Christianity can make to the humanism of the future. The question of man, and thus of modernity, challenges the Church to devise effective ways of proclaiming to contemporary culture the "realism" of her faith in the saving work of Christ. Christianity must not be relegated to the world of myth and emotion, but respected for its claim to shed light on the truth about man, to be able to transform men and women spiritually, and thus to enable them to carry out

their vocation in history. In my recent visit to Brazil, I voiced my conviction that "unless we do know God in and with Christ, all of reality becomes an indecipherable enigma" (*Address to Bishops of CELAM*, 3). Knowledge can never be limited to the purely intellectual realm; it also includes a renewed ability to look at things in a way free of prejudices and preconceptions, and to allow ourselves to be "amazed" by reality, whose truth can be discovered by uniting understanding with love. Only the God who has a human face, revealed in Jesus Christ, can prevent us from truncating reality at the very moment when it demands ever new and more complex levels of understanding. The Church is conscious of her responsibility to offer this contribution to contemporary culture.

In Europe, as elsewhere, society urgently needs the service to wisdom which the university community provides. This service extends also to the practical aspects of directing research and activity to the promotion of human dignity and to the daunting task of building the civilization of love. University professors, in particular, are called to embody the virtue of intellectual charity, recovering their primordial vocation to train future generations not only by imparting knowledge but by the prophetic witness of their own lives. The university, for its part, must never lose sight of its particular calling to be an "*universitas"* in which the various disciplines, each in its own way, are seen as part of a greater *unum*. How urgent is the need to rediscover the unity of knowledge and to counter the tendency to fragmentation and lack of communicability that is all too often the case in our schools! The effort to reconcile the drive to specialization with the need to preserve the unity of knowledge can encourage the growth of European unity and help the continent to rediscover its specific cultural "vocation" in today's world. Only a Europe conscious of its own cultural identity can make a specific contribution to other cultures, while remaining open to the contribution of other peoples.

Dear friends, it is my hope that universities will increasingly become communities committed to the tireless pursuit of truth, "laboratories of culture" where teachers and students join in exploring issues of particular importance for society, employing interdisciplinary methods and counting on the collaboration of theologians. This can easily be done in Europe, given the presence of so many prestigious Catholic institutions and faculties of theology. I am convinced that greater cooperation and new forms of fellowship between the various academic communities will enable Catholic universities to bear witness to the historical fruitfulness of the encounter between faith and reason. The result will be a concrete contribution to the attainment of the goals of the Bologna Process, and an incentive for developing a suitable university apostolate in the local Churches. Effective support for these efforts, which have been increasingly a concern of the European Episcopal Conferences (cf. *Ecclesia in Europa*, 58-59), can come from those ecclesial associations and movements already engaged in the university apostolate.

Dear friends, may your deliberations during these days prove fruitful and help to build an active network of university instructors committed to bringing the light of the Gospel to contemporary culture. I assure you and your families of a special remembrance in my prayers, and I invoke upon you, and the universities in which you work, the maternal protection of Mary, Seat of Wisdom. To each of you I affectionately impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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