

[John Paul II](#) [1]

1989, June 9

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Rector Magnificus of the University of Uppsala and Rectores Magnifici of the Swedish Universities and Institutes of Higher Learning, Your Grace, Archbishop Werkström, Distinguished Guests and Dear Students,

1. It is not without a deep sense of history that I participate, as your guest, in this august assembly. I thank you, Honourable Rector, for your kind words of welcome. Allow me to express to all of you my profound gratitude.

As Bishop of Rome, I cannot but rejoice in the fact that this University of Uppsala owes its birth to an official act of my predecessor, Pope Sixtus IV, in the year 1477. At the request of the then Archbishop of Uppsala, Jakob Ulfsson, the University was founded with the aim of strengthening the intellectual and spiritual relations between the Nordic Countries and the whole of Europe. The fact that, more than five centuries later, the successor of Sixtus IV is privileged to visit this prestigious University, once created by the Holy See, moves me deeply.

Times indeed have changed immensely since the foundation of the *University of Uppsala*. The very modest institution which started in the late fifteenth century with a small group of lecturers and students was an heir to the highest intellectual ideals of the Christian Middle Ages. The University soon became identified with the history of Sweden and closely linked with the destiny of its kings, its nobility, its people. The *Studium Generale* of Uppsala took its place very honourably in the family of great European universities that spread in time over the Continent. *Famous masters from Uppsala* became household names in the intellectual history of Europe and the world: just to mention a few, we may recall Celsius, Swedenborg and Linnaeus. The University pursued a tradition of excellence in the disciplines of the liberal arts, jurisprudence, science, philosophy, medicine and theology. Although it experienced the unfortunate events which caused European Christians to part company at the Reformation, the University has also witnessed in recent years the growing aspiration of many Christians for a restoration of unity in Jesus Christ, an aspiration which has found expression in the ecumenical commitment of many Lutheran personalities of Uppsala, including Nathan Söderblom, former Lutheran Archbishop of this city.

2. Ladies and Gentlemen: it is *in the name of our common Christian heritage* that I propose to reflect with you today on the mission of a *university in the service of the human person* within the historical and cultural circumstances of our day. We must work out together, for our own times, a form of higher education that will bring to the younger generations the *lasting values of an intellectual tradition enriched by two millennia of humanistic and Christian experience*.

In the past, the ideal of the *Universitas* was to *strive for the unification of knowledge* by seeking to reconcile all the elements of truth attainable from the natural and sacred sciences. What was revealed through human study was understood in the light of the Revelation found in the Gospel. The truth of grace is also the truth of nature, as was once beautifully expressed in the University of Uppsala's motto: "*Gratiae veritas naturae*". Of course, today's scientific development and the prodigious scale of modern research render unthinkable any simple synthesis of present-day knowledge. There exist no modern versions of the ancient *Summa*, *Compendium* or *Tractatus*. But many among the best minds in the university world today insist on redefining for our time an original concept of *Universitas and Humanitas*, which should still *pursue in new ways a necessary integration of knowledge*, if we are to

avoid the pitfalls of a too pragmatic professionalization and unrelated overspecialization in university programmes. The future of a truly human culture, open to ethical and spiritual values, is at stake.

3. A *new Christian humanism* and a new version of liberal arts education is clearly called for, and the Catholic Church follows with the greatest interest the research and experiments that are taking place in relation to this question. In the first place, we have to accept realistically the development and transformation of modern universities, which have grown immensely in number and complexity. Modern countries are proud of their universities, which are key institutions for the progress of advanced societies. This makes it all the more *urgent therefore to reflect on the European universities' specific vocation to keep alive the ideal of a liberal education and the universal values* that a cultural tradition, marked by Christianity, brings to higher learning.

The days are now past when the European universities unanimously referred themselves to one central authority in Christianity. Our societies have to live in a pluralistic context, which calls for dialogue between many spiritual traditions in a new quest for harmony and collaboration. But it is still essential for the *university, as an institution, to refer constantly to the intellectual and spiritual heritage that has shaped our European identity over the centuries.*

4. What is that heritage? Let us think for a moment of the following *fundamental values of our civilization*: the dignity of the person, the sacred character of life, the central role of the family, the importance of education, the freedom to think, to speak and to profess one's own convictions or religion, the lawful protection of individuals and groups, the cooperation of all for the common good, the concept of work as a sharing in the Creator's own work, the authority of the State, itself governed by law and reason. These *values belong to the cultural treasure of Europe*, a treasure which is the result of much thought, debate and suffering. They represent a spiritual achievement of reason and justice which honours the peoples of Europe as they strive to implement in the temporal order the spirit of Christian brotherhood taught by the Gospel.

Universities should be the special place for giving light and warmth to these beliefs, which are *rooted in the Greco-Roman world and which have been enriched and uplifted by the Judeo-Christian tradition.* It was this tradition which developed the higher concept of the *human person*, seen as an image of God, redeemed by Christ and called to an eternal destiny, endowed with inalienable rights, and responsible for the common good of society. The theological discussion about the two natures of Jesus Christ permitted the development of the concept of *person*, which is the cornerstone of Western civilization.

The individual was thus situated in a natural order of creation with objective conditions and requirements. *Man's position no longer rested on the whim of statesmen or ideologies, but upon an objective, universal natural law.* This basic principle was stated expressly in the Bull of Foundation of the University of Uppsala: The human race is governed and ordered by the natural and moral order – "*Humanum genus naturali iuri et morali regitur et gubernatur*" (Bolla *Si iuxta sanctorum*, ed. di J. Liedgren, in *Acta Universitatis Upsalensis*, c. 44, Uppsala 1983).

5. Today there is a growing moral consciousness of the truth of this principle, shared by peoples every-where. An individual's worth and dignity does not depend on political or ideological systems but is grounded on the natural order, an objective order of values. Such a conviction led to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, a milestone in the history of humanity, which the Catholic Church has defended and expanded in several official documents. The tragic events of this century have shown how human beings can be threatened and destroyed when governments deny the fundamental dignity of the person. We have seen great nations forgetting their cultural traditions and decreeing laws for the

extermination of entire populations, and for tragic discrimination against ethnic or religious groups. We have also witnessed the moral integrity of men and women who have heroically opposed such aberrations through courageous acts of resistance and compassion. I cannot fail to mention *your compatriot Raoul Wallenberg*, who in praiseworthy fashion rescued so many members of the Jewish people from Nazi concentration camps. His example inspires a dedicated fight for human rights.

The dignity of the person can be protected only if the *person is considered as inviolable* from the moment of conception until natural death. A person cannot be reduced to the status of a means or a tool of others. Society exists to promote the security and dignity of the person. Therefore, the primary right which society must defend is *the right to life*. Whether in the womb or in the final phase of life, a person may never be disposed of in order to make life easier for others. *Every person must be treated as an end in himself or herself*. This is a fundamental principle for all human activity: in health care, in the upbringing of children, in education, in the media. The attitudes of individuals or societies in this regard can be measured by the treatment given to those who for various reasons cannot compete in society – the handicapped, the sick, the aged and the dying. Unless a society treats the human person as inviolable, the formulation of consistent ethical principles becomes impossible, as does the creation of a moral climate which fosters the protection of the weakest members of the human family.

6. As I had the occasion to state last year, on the ninth centenary of the University of Bologna, one of the richest legacies of the Western university tradition is precisely the concept that a civilized society rests on the *primacy of reason and law*. As Bishop of Rome, a son of Poland and once a member of the Polish academic community, I whole-heartedly encourage all the representatives of intellectual and cultural life who are engaged in revitalizing the classical and Christian heritage of the university institution. Not all teachers, not all students are equally involved in the study of theology and the liberal arts, but *all can benefit from the transmission of a culture enriched by that great common tradition*.

Your university system has kept alive the teaching of theology, and this offers an open forum for studying the word of God and its meaning for the men and women of today. *Our times are in great need of interdisciplinary research in meeting the complex challenges brought by progress*. These problems bear on the meaning of life and death, the threats involved in genetic manipulation, the scope of education and the transmission of knowledge and wisdom to the younger generation. We certainly have to admire the marvellous discoveries of science, but we are also aware of the devastating power of modern technology, capable of destroying the earth and all it contains. A mobilization of minds and consciences therefore is urgently needed.

It is vital for the future of our civilization that questions such as these should be jointly examined by scientific experts as well as by expert theologians, so that all aspects of technical and moral issues may be carefully considered. Speaking to UNESCO in Paris on 2 June 1980, I made a special appeal to the moral potential of all men and women of culture. I said then and repeat before this distinguished assembly today: “All together you are an enormous power: the power of intelligences and consciences! Show yourselves to be more powerful than the most powerful in our modern world! Make up your mind to give proof to the most noble solidarity with mankind: the solidarity founded on the dignity of the human person”. In this great task you will find an *ally in the Catholic Church*, an ally willing to cooperate fully with her Christian brothers and sisters and with all people of good will.

7. We Christians openly proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but we do not impose our faith or convictions on anyone. We acknowledge the lack of unanimity in the way in which human rights are grounded philosophically. Nevertheless, we are all called to defend every human being, who is the subject of inalienable human rights, and work towards achieving among our contemporaries a *consensus about*

the existence and substance of these human rights. This attitude of realistic dialogue has been decisive in the emergence of international organizations such as the United Nations, charged with the task of building peace and encouraging collaboration in the world. Sweden has been deeply committed to the spirit and achievements of the United Nations, not least through the dedication of Dag Hammarskjöld, a noble son of this land.

Our times call for a generous commitment of the best minds in universities, in intellectual circles, in research centres, in the media, in the creative arts, to exploring the shape of a *new worldwide solidarity* linked to the search for dignity and justice for every individual and every people. *Nordic scholars and students have a specific contribution to make.* Your cultural tradition gives you a vantage point which brings together all the living traditions of the Continent: the Scandinavian, German, Celtic, Slav and Latin. You are at the crossroads, at a junction point between East and West, and you can encourage a dialogue aimed at bringing the universities of Eastern and Western Europe into closer collaboration, an enterprise that would be intellectually decisive in the construction of tomorrow's greater Europe.

Europe still bears a great responsibility in the world. Because of its Christian history, Europe's vocation is one of openness and service to the whole human family. But today Europe has a very special obligation towards developing nations. A major challenge of our time is precisely the *development of all peoples* in full respect for their cultures and spiritual identity. Our generation has still much to do, if it is to avoid the historical reproach of not having fought with all its heart and mind to defeat the misery of so many millions of our brothers and sisters.

This is the message I have presented in my Encyclical Letter "[Sollicitudo Rei Socialis](#) [2]", on the development of peoples. We have to fight against all forms of poverty, physical as well as cultural and spiritual. Development certainly has an economic dimension, but it would not be true human development if it were limited to material needs. "Development which is not only economic must be measured and oriented according to the reality and vocation of man seen in his totality, namely, according to his *interior dimension*" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II [Sollicitudo Rei Socialis](#) [3], 29). We rightly speak today of the cultural dimension of development, and I am sure that in promoting such a model of development, intellectuals and university scholars have an indispensable contribution to make.

8. In conclusion, I would repeat the sentiments expressed in the Second Vatican Council's Closing Message to Men and Women of Thought and Science: "Happy are those who, while possessing the truth, search more earnestly for it in order to renew it, deepen it, and transmit it to others. Happy also are those who, not having found it, are working towards it with a sincere heart... Never has there been so clear a possibility as today of a deep understanding between true science and true faith, mutual servants of one another in the one truth... Have confidence in faith, this great friend of intelligence!".

Ladies and Gentlemen: I leave you with these thoughts, expressed with esteem and in friendship. May God sustain you, men and women of learning, in your service of the Truth, your dedication to Goodness and your love of Beauty. May our host University, the great University of Uppsala, thrive for centuries to come. God bless you all! Thank you.

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