

we are children of God. During this pontificate, thanks be to God, Catholics have responded to the Pope's constant call for a new evangelization, which involves opening up human hearts and social structures to Christ. We must pray that, in this common effort to illumine the world with Christ's light, we will follow the path to full unity with all Christians. In recent years there have been very encouraging signs that give one renewed hope.

*The document "We are Church" has received thousands of signatures, especially among Catholics from the countries of northern Europe. One of its central themes is the role of women in the Church. What do you think of this paper and how do you view the future?*

It is understandable that some people have difficulty in comprehending that the Catholic priesthood is reserved solely to men. But, frankly, I think that the role of women in the life of the Church is much richer and broader. It seems to me that it is a great impoverishment to reduce the discussion on the mission of women in the Church to the ministerial priesthood, a question by the way that has already been definitively clarified by the Church's magisterium.

The contribution of women to ecclesial life is, in my opinion, a very important topic. It is something that we will see being developed more fully in the future, above all through the life experience of Christian women.

The Church urgently needs women whose life is consistent with

their faith at all times, who carry out evangelizing initiatives, who bring their point of view to many questions, who are valiant witnesses to Jesus Christ. I have no doubt that in the years ahead we will see a peaceful mobilization of Christian women. This will be an enterprise of holiness and apostolate, of study and doctrinal training, that will have as its fruit the enrichment of the entire Church.

## Vatican City September 15, 2000

*Article published in L'Osservatore Romano on the occasion of the Jubilee of University Professors*

*"Dominus dabit benignitatem, et terra nostra dabit fructum suum."* "The Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase" (Ps 85:12). Haven't we all, at one time or another, had an opportunity to contemplate streams of water running down from snow-capped mountains?

In the spring of 1256, St. Thomas Aquinas was called upon to give his inaugural lecture as Professor of Theology at the University of Paris. Only thirty-one years old, he felt unworthy of such a prestigious position. In addition, he had difficulty finding an appropriate topic for this event. His biographers say that he was still turning this over in his head when he fell asleep. In his dreams he met an old man who set his

mind at rest and invited him to give his lecture on a verse from psalm 104: "From thy lofty abode thou waterest the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy work."

Thomas, upon waking, decided to give his discourse on these words from the psalm, applying them to the professors. As the rain waters the mountains, forming rivers that make the valleys fruitful, so wisdom comes from God to men through those who teach. We can employ this metaphor inspired by sacred scripture in recalling today the mission and responsibility of professors, on the occasion of the Jubilee.

To fully understand the meaning and value of a university we must go beyond any merely functional statement that considers institutions as pieces of machinery.

The university is not just a mechanism for professional preparation. It cannot be reduced to a bureaucracy for information. Rather it should be the soul of a society, the place where one seeks, accumulates and transmits wisdom. The fields and forests depend in good part on the purity of the water that irrigates the land. In other words, man's life depends on the wisdom that flows from the fountains: true wisdom, inspired by love and destined for service, not a rationalism turned in on itself, blind and empty. Authentic wisdom, which is one, admits of specializations; but it cannot be separated from a global vision of man, of his origin, his nature and his destiny. Wisdom is respectful of the autonomy of temporal realities and the legitimate opinions of others; but

it does not make concessions when faced with the truth and its demands, although it may have to put up with misunderstanding and discrimination. Wisdom is a gift and, at the same time, a conquest of freedom.

On the occasion of an academic ceremony held at the University of Navarre, I had the opportunity of hearing the founder of Opus Dei, Blessed Josemaria Escriva, say the following: "The university does not live with its back turned to any of the uncertainties, worries, or needs of mankind. Its mission is not to offer immediate solutions. But in studying problems with scientific rigor, it also moves hearts, urges on the passive, awakens sleeping powers, and forms citizens disposed to build a more just society. It thus contributes with its universal work to eliminating barriers that hinder mutual understanding among men. It eases fear before an uncertain future, and fosters—through love for truth, justice and charity—true peace and harmony among individuals and nations" (Academic address, October 7, 1972).

Wisdom at the service of man, imbued with a moral sense; wisdom that breaks down barriers and banishes fear. This is the central task of a university, and it is a responsibility that challenges Christians in a very special way. A university professor who is a disciple of Jesus follows his Master with his faith and with his heart, with his thought and with his whole life. His example and teachings, when they conform to the Gospel, become a sowing of peace. How can we fail to see this as an exciting task?

For everyone, the Jubilee means conversion to Jesus Christ. For those who work in the university, the Jubilee is also concretized in an invitation to consider, anew and in depth, its role in the world and in the Church. It is also a call to renew the desire for Christian consistency, attained through the effort to know and love Jesus, God made man, who gives himself to us in the sacraments, who listens to us and speaks to us in prayer; who comes to meet us in our work. Yes, the work of the intellect also, the fatiguing but incomparable work of examining the truth, in the light of faith, with a desire of loving and serving, can and should be turned into prayer.

When the minds and hearts of intellectuals are open to the light and warmth of God's love, there descends upon them torrents of wisdom, as the water runs down from the snow-capped peaks, filling the fields with fruit. Our times call out, more than does arid land, for an end to the "drama of the separation of faith and reason" (John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 45). And this work is the task of intellectuals: it depends on their faith and love, on each one's humble correspondence to God's grace. Then in our day and age the words of the psalm will be fulfilled: "Dominus dabit benignitatem, et terra nostra dabit fructum suum" (Ps 85:12).

## Milan, Italy October 1, 2000

*Article published in the newspaper "Avvenire" on the occasion of the canonization of Saint Giuseppina Bakhita*

"The saints are the supreme expression of beauty." These words of the Pope, spoken in an informal conversation with journalists during a plane trip to spread the Gospel, seem very appropriate for describing the holy life of Josephine Bakhita.

The saints, through the power of their witness, make up for the violence against man committed in the course of history. They deeply transform, each in his or her own way, all that others suffer. Their importance for the present age is especially timely, in this century of "progress" that nothing defines more starkly than the number of its martyrs. The saints' patience in the face of injustice displays the vigor of the most refined charity, while their docile suffering illuminates every corner of daily life. By their determination to love always and at all costs, the saints are the ones who create new civilizations.

An outstanding example of this reality is Josephine Bakhita, the Canossian nun who died in Schio, Italy, in 1947. Her life was marked by great suffering. She was kidnapped and enslaved when still a little girl, tortured, and sold several times in the slave markets of El Obeidh and Khartoum (recent documents, including audiovisuals, testify to the continuance of a flourishing slave trade in the Sudan). After being rescued by the Italian consul in 1882, she was taken in by the Canossians of Schio and baptized at the age of 21. At 27 she became a Canossian nun. Her path was truly a difficult one, and her natural goodness was not enough to explain the compassion she showed for those who had made her suffer.