



# The Holy See

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JOHN PAUL II

## **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday 2 August 2000*

1. *"How greatly to be desired are all his works, and how sparkling they are to see!... Though we speak much we cannot reach the end, and the sum of our words is: "He is the all'.... He is greater than all his works" (Sir 42: 22; 43: 27-28).* These wonderful words of Sirach sum up the hymn of praise, sung in every age and under every sky, to the Creator who reveals himself through the immensity and splendour of his works.

Although in still imperfect ways, many voices have recognized in creation the presence of its Author and Lord. An ancient Egyptian king and poet, addressing his sun god, exclaimed: "How manifold it is, what thou hast made! They are hidden from the face (of man). O sole god, like whom there is no other! Thou didst create the world according to thy desire, whilst thou wert alone" ("The Hymn to Aton", in J. B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 3rd ed. [Princeton 1969], pp. 369-371).

A few centuries later, a Greek philosopher also celebrated in a marvellous hymn the divinity manifest in nature and especially in man: "We are your offspring, and we have speech as a reflection of your mind, we alone of all the animate beings who live and move on the earth" (Cleanthes, *Hymn to Zeus*, vv. 4-5). The Apostle Paul would take up this acclamation, citing it in his discourse at the Areopagus of Athens (cf. *Acts* 17: 28).

2. The Muslim believer is also required to hear the word that the Creator has entrusted to the works of his hands: "O men, adore your Lord, who has created you and those who have gone before you: fear him who has made the earth a bed for you and the sky a dome, and has sent down water from the sky to bring forth fruits for your sustenance" (*Koran*, II, 21-23). The Jewish tradition which flourished in the fertile soil of the Bible, would discover God's personal presence in

every corner of creation: "Where I wander - You! Where I ponder - You! Only You, You again, always You! ... Sky is You! Earth is You! You alone! You below! In every trend, at every end, only You, You again, always You!" (M. Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim* [Italian ed., Milan 1979, p. 276]).

3. Biblical revelation is set within this broad experience of religious awareness and human prayer, putting the divine seal upon it. In communicating the mystery of the Trinity to us, it helps us perceive in creation itself not only the marks of the Father, source of all life, but also those of the Son and the Spirit. The Christian's gaze now turns to the whole Trinity when he contemplates the heavens with the Psalmist: "By the word of the Lord" - that is, by his eternal Word - "the heavens were made; by the breath of his mouth" - that is, by his Holy Spirit - "all their host" (*Ps* 33: 6). Thus "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day pours out the word to day, and night to night imparts knowledge. Not a word nor a discourse whose voice is not heard; through all the earth their voice resounds, and to the ends of the world, their message" (*Ps* 19: 2-5).

The ear of the heart must be free of noise in order to hear this divine voice echoing in the universe. Along with revelation properly so-called, contained in Sacred Scripture, there is a divine manifestation in the blaze of the sun and the fall of night. Nature too, in a certain sense, is "the book of God".

4. We can ask ourselves how it is possible in Christian experience for contemplation of the Trinity to be fostered through creation, discerning there not only the reflection of the one God in a generic sense, but also the marks of the individual divine persons. If it is true, in fact, that "the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are not three principles of creation but one principle" (Council of Florence, DS 1331), it is also true as well that "each divine person performs the common work according to his unique personal property" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 258*).

So when we contemplate with wonder the universe in its grandeur and beauty, we must praise the whole Trinity, but in a special way our thoughts turn to the Father from whom everything flows, as the source and fullness of being itself. If we then reflect on the order that governs the cosmos and admire the wisdom with which the Father created it, endowing it with laws that regulate its existence, we naturally think of the eternal Son, presented to us by Scripture as the Word (cf. *Jn* 1: 1-3) and divine Wisdom (cf. *1 Cor* 1: 24, 30). In the marvellous hymn sung by Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs, which was presented at the start of our meeting, she says: "Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning" (*Prv* 8: 23). Wisdom is present at the moment of creation "like a master workman" (*Prv* 8: 30), ready to delight "in the sons of men" (cf. *Prv* 8: 30-31). From these aspects Christian tradition has seen in Wisdom the face of Christ, "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ... all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (*Col* 1: 15-17; cf. *Jn* 1: 3).

5. In the light of the Christian faith, creation particularly calls to mind the Holy Spirit in the

dynamism that marks the relations between things, within the macrocosm and the microcosm, and is apparent especially wherever life is born and develops. Because of this experience, even in cultures far removed from Christianity, the presence of God is perceived in a way as the "spirit" which gives life to the world. Vergil's words are famous in this regard: "*spiritus intus alit*", "*the spirit nourishes from within*" (*Aeneid*, VI, 726).

The Christian knows well that this reference to the Spirit would be unacceptable if it meant a sort of "*anima mundi*" taken in a pantheistic sense. However, while excluding this error, it remains true that every form of life, activity and love refers in the last analysis to that Spirit who, as Genesis tells us, "was moving over the face of the waters" (*Gn* 1: 2) at the dawn of creation and in which Christians, in the light of the New Testament, see a reference to the Third Person of the Holy Trinity. Indeed, the biblical concept of creation "includes not only the call to existence of the very being of the cosmos, that is to say *the giving of existence*, but also the presence of the Spirit of God in creation, that is to say the beginning of God's salvific self-communication to the things he creates. This is true first of all concerning man, who has been created in the image and likeness of God" (*Dominum et Vivificantem*, n. 12).

Before the unfolding of cosmic revelation, we proclaim God's work in the words of the Psalmist: "When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth" (*Ps* 104: 30).

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I extend a special welcome to the Ecumenical Jubilee pilgrimage from the Diocese of Portsmouth, and to the large group of pilgrims from Hong Kong. Upon all the English-speaking visitors, especially from England, from Gozo in Malta and from the United States of America, I invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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