



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO INTERNATIONAL Conference on Space Research,
University of Padua, Italy**

Saturday, 11 January 1997

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am pleased to welcome the distinguished participants in the *International Conference on Space Research* which has just concluded its meeting at the University of Padua on the theme, "The Three Galileos: The Man, the Spacecraft, the Telescope". You have concentrated your attention on recent scientific results from the spacecraft Galileo and on your expectations of future findings both from that spacecraft and from the Italian National Telescope, also named for Galileo and inaugurated just eight months ago at a site in the Canary Islands. I congratulate the scientists from the Jet Propulsion Laboratory and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration whose achievements have been solemnly recognized by the University of Padua, where the great physicist himself spent many fruitful years.

2. The spacecraft Galileo and the Italian National Telescope are both making significant contributions to the formation of a more comprehensive vision of the universe. Building on well-established experimental results, you and others around the world are perfecting a model which traces the whole evolution of the universe from an infinitesimal instant after the starting-point of time up to the present, and beyond, into the distant future. As never before man's gaze is open to the wonders of the universe. And the marvel of it all is *a constant call to ponder ever more seriously the greatness of man's own destiny* and his dependence upon the Creator. Thus, while we stand in awe before the vastness of the cosmos and the dynamism which pervades it, our hearts echo with certain fascinating and fundamental questions which continue to challenge humanity at the dawn of the new millennium.

3. The participation of the Vatican Observatory in your work is a practical sign of the Church's appreciation of the particular genius, objectivity, self-discipline and respect for truth which scientists bring to the exploration of the universe. Your dedication to scientific research constitutes a veritable vocation at the service of the human family, a vocation which the Church greatly honours and esteems. That vocation is all the more fruitful when it helps us to acknowledge the link

between the beauty and order of the universe and the dignity of the human person — reflections of the creative majesty of God. The more men and women of science engage in rigorous research to penetrate the laws of the universe, *the more insistent becomes the question of meaning and purpose*, the more pressing the demand for contemplative reflection which cannot help but lead to a profound appreciation of the sense of man's transcendence over the world, and of God over man (cf. *Address at UNESCO*, 2 June 1980, n. 22).

Through you, who have kindly wished to share the deliberations of your conference with me, I address an appeal to all your colleagues in the various fields of scientific investigation: Make every effort to respect the primacy of ethics in your work; always be concerned with the moral implications of your methods and your discoveries. It is my prayer that scientists will never forget that *the cause of humanity is authentically served only if knowledge is joined to conscience*.

4. Ladies and gentlemen, in concluding these brief remarks I confide to you my hope that the research which brings you so close to the marvellous mysteries of the universe will enkindle in you an ever deeper appreciation of God's power and wisdom. May your discoveries contribute to the building of a society ever more respectful of all that is truly human. May the Lord of heaven and earth bless you all abundantly!

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