

JOHN PAUL II'S VISION OF EUROPE

ACADEMIC CONFERENCE OF THE INSTITUTE OF JOHN PAUL II, 16-18 MAY, 1994

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Ladies and Gentlemen!

Most distinguished participants in the conference "The John Paul II Vision of Europe"!

I am immensely pleased that the Catholic University of Lublin is today host to the conference entitled "The John Paul II Vision of Europe," and, thanks to this opportunity, may welcome the company of such distinguished guests coming from many countries of Europe and from America.

The conference which you are about to begin is primarily connected with the person of the Holy Father, and also with a word which is so often spoken by us, particularly since the time of the famous turning point of the year 1989. This word is – Europe.

A full evaluation of the importance of John Paul II's pontificate for the history of mankind is perhaps, as yet, impossible. It will be achieved, owing to a proper distance, only by future generations. Is it not the case that the meaning of the Paul VI pontificate may be understood in a fuller sense now while we follow the pontificate of John Paul II? Let us consider finally the first pilgrimages by Pope Paul VI, The Second Vatican Council, the encyclical *Humanae vitae*, a proclamation of the ideal of a "Civilization of Love," and let us now think how all these works and events are bearing fruit in the John Paul II's pontificate. It was here in Poland that John Paul II recalled the desire of Paul VI to come to us at Jasna Góra in Częstochowa – this was in 1966 – and that this was such a great desire that it "overgrew the framework of a singular pontificate."

Although we still lack the prospect of being able to grasp the fullness of the importance of John Paul II's pontificate, we evidently see already now, in fact, how much it also outgrows its own framework. In a certain sense, it begins a new epoch in history. Some historians claim that the nineteenth century ended with the outbreak of the World War I. Beginning with that big war, the world – and Europe in particular – entered the twentieth century. I think that now, through the pontificate of John Paul II, we are already entering the twenty-first century.

André Malraux said: "The twentieth century will be an Age of Spirit, or it will not occur at all." This short sentence renders very accurately an alternative which confronts us today. John Paul II points out the solution to this alternative. He is a Pope of the liberation of man for life "in spirit and in truth." This is the reason why his pontificate is marked by such unconditional commitment – a commitment at the same time so pregnant with effects for the whole of Europe – to the liberation of the people of Central and Eastern Europe from Communism, thereby pointing the way to the future for the whole of Europe, and for the world. "There is no better programme than the programme of solidarity" – he has said some years ago in Gdańsk, one of the great European cities.

Ladies and gentlemen! When in 1983 John Paul II came on a pilgrimage to Poland, we Poles were concerned about what the Holy Father might say to people living under the difficult conditions of martial law. But when the pilgrimage was over, someone appeared who was already living in exile, a Professor of our university – Father Blachnicki – who had conceived and understood the papal programme. Father Blachnicki phrased his comments on the teaching of John Paul II as follows: "An evangelical programme, a difficult programme – an indispensable programme." The same programme, grasped and formulated at that time by this Polish priest, is today called the Programme of the New Evangelisation, and this is a task for the whole of Europe.

I hope that this conference, which I am honoured to open today, will be a help to all of us who come from different parts of Europe, and from other parts of the world, not only to comprehend the programme of John Paul II but also to proclaim it – together with him – to contemporary humanity, so that this programme may more and more become a reality.

I apologize for not being able to take part in the individual sessions, as I am hindered by my various duties as Rector of the University. I am convinced, however, that the results of your conference will remain as a lasting part of the legacy of the Catholic University of Lublin, and in this way I shall be able to participate in them myself, and use them. In this spirit I open the conference "The John Paul II's Vision of Europe" and wish you good and fruitful proceedings.