

**TWO SPEECHES BENEDICT XVI ADRESSED TO UNIVERSITY PEOPLE**  
**(Rome, 23<sup>RD</sup> June 2007 and 7<sup>th</sup> June 2008)**  
*Being Christian in University*

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The two Pope's speeches (*to the participants at the Meeting of Rectors and Professors of European Universities 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2007; To the participants at the VI European Symposium of University Professors on the topic "Broadening the horizons of rationality: perspectives for Philosophy", 7<sup>th</sup> June 2008*), to which we are referring to, show on the whole **three fundamental instances** concerning our presence « as Christian in University » today.

**The first instance**

Benedict XVI notes above all that the European Universities are living and operating inside a context of cultural crisis, that is « the crisis of modernity ».

According to the Pope's diagnosis, this crisis is due to a widespread assent to an untrue model of humanism, which « claims to build a *regnum hominis* detached from its necessary ontological foundation » (Speech of 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2007).

So the Pope invites all University people to **study exhaustively the crisis of modernity**.

On this way the whole teaching of Benedict XVI offers several points to reflect on.

We can refer, for instance, to the third chapter of his recent book *Jesus of Nazareth*, in which he deals with the temptations in the desert.

The three temptations, explains the Pope in this context, have got a « perverse core in common »: anyway it is a matter « to remove God », establishing a false hierarchy of values.

The temptation – notes Benedict XVI – is hidden under « the pretending of real realism. The real is what we can verify: power and bread. In comparison with it, the things of God seem to be unreal, a secondary world of which we do not need » (p. 51), and of which we can do without, at the end.

It is important to note that by this type of speech, Benedict XVI does not want at all to depreciate the scientific and technological progress, and nor the earth values, the worldly ones, as someone reproached him: among other things, few Pontiffs insisted on some values as he did, like the respect of nature and ecology for a safety development of our planet.

Rather, he wants to confirm the right hierarchy of values to grant the authentic hope of the human being.

A model, which refuses God as the only absolute value, confining him inside a sphere of an optional religious individualistic practise, inevitably plunges in the abyss of non sense. The worldly values, when released from a reference to the only absolute value, lost their authentic mean, and – undeservedly absolutized – they become idols, lethal traps killing the human being dignity.

That is the real drama of the technological progress in an advanced society. When this is not opportunely relative made with a clear reference to the absolute values of the human person, then the presumed « progress » proves to be vain and injurious to a global growth of human being.

The concept of a world as *regnum hominis*, the Pope refuses resolutely, generates a false hope. It is based upon a merely horizontal reading of the reality, in which only some earthly values can find space, just as peace, tolerance, social justice, the safety of the creation..., without any references to God.

This the great challenge the modernity, inside her crisis, puts to the believer: these values – as they really are –, if undeservedly absolute made, let human being without safety and without hope (cfr. *Spe Salvi*, *passim*).

Vice versa, the earthly values above listed can find the more large space of growth and of development inside a world open to recognize its own limit, and that consider the absolute truth of itself – and of the man – in the Love open to give his own life for the ones he loves.

### **The second instance**

Particularly, the Pope, by his two speeches, shows a way to come out from the crisis positively, and – after all – to live « as Christian in University ».

Essentially it is matter to **broaden our idea of rationality**, so that the reason can effectively meet the Truth.

Considering a recurrent topic in the Benedict XVI's patristic catechesis, the Fathers of the Church – that is the first masters of our faith, after the writings of the New Testament – have already strongly broadened the reason: they « broadened » the *logos* of Greek, of famous platonic and stoic character, to express in this way the *Logos* of the Christian preaching, the second Person of the blessed Trinity, the son of God became flesh inside the Mary's womb, the only Saviour of the world.

At the bottom of this broadening of the reason, we can find the clear choose of the first Christian faith: « The Christian faith has chosen clearly: against the Gods of religion for the God of Philosophers, that is against the myth of the habit for the truth of being » (*Introduction to Christianity*, chapt. III; cfr. Speech of 7<sup>th</sup> June 2008).

Returning to our days, the Pope encourage to understand that « the crisis of modernity is not synonymous with the decline in philosophy; instead philosophy must commit itself to a new path of research to comprehend the true nature of this crisis », that was the **first instance**, and « identify new prospectives toward which to be oriented », and that is the **second instance** (Speech of 7<sup>th</sup> June 2008).

And here it is the *new prospective* Benedict XVI advises: « The concept of reason needs instead to be "broadened" in order to be able to explore and embrace those aspects of reality which go beyond the purely empirical ». And he continues: « This will allow for a more fruitful, complementary approach to the relationship between faith and reason ».

This prospective, appeared in the Speech of 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2007, has been then taken back and developed – *monographically*, so to say – in the next Speech of the 7<sup>th</sup> June 2008: as a matter of fact, it should be totally read in this prospective.

Particularly, here it happens, about the relationship between faith and reason, something like what the Pope himself teaches in the *Deus caritas est* about the relationships between *eros* and *agape*: « The more the two, in their different aspects » writes the Pontiff in the n. 7 of his first Encyclical, « find a proper unity in the one reality of love, the more the true nature of love in general is realized ».

In the same way, only a reason open to the faith – a reason that actually will refer to faith, also respecting the requested distinctions between reason and faith and of their respective ways – allows to human beings to attain to the deep Truth of his own being, that is the Love. As a matter of fact, the human being has been created « in imagine and resemblance » of that God able « to turn towards himself » for love reasons (*ibidem*, n. 12). This is the real « key » to explain the history and the human existence.

After all, state the Pope in his speech of 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2007, « The rise of the European universities was fostered by the conviction that faith and reason are meant to cooperate in the search for truth, each respecting the nature and legitimate autonomy of the other, yet working together harmoniously and creatively to serve the fulfilment of the human person in truth and love ».

Only the meeting with Jesus Christ, Truth and Love, can revive the heart to a new hope, which is not only the hope of this world, but also the definitive one of the new skies and new earth.

### **The third instance**

The third instance is totally concerning the « realism of faith », in which the Pope finds out **the fundamental contribute the presence of Christian people in University can offer to the coming humanism.**

Today the Church – the Pope claims – is requested « to devise effective ways of proclaiming to contemporary culture the "realism" of her faith in the saving work of Christ » (Speech of 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2007).

The so called « realism of faith », according to the Pope Ratzinger's thought, is based on the fact that at the centre of our faith there is not an ensemble of theoretic asserts, but the real meeting – just has happened on the road of Emmaus – with a Person, Jesus of Nazareth, the Saviour. So, the same « realism of faith » withstands to a merely intellectual and abstract vision of God.

For this the Pope is depend on his own dearest Masters: the great Writers and Doctors of the Church, from Origen to Agustin, till St. Bonaventure. For all them, the higher form of knowledge is love.

This is the « realism of faith » the Church is requested to introduce in the cultural and University debate as one of her own genuine contribute to the new humanism; this is the « return to Jerusalem » after having met the risen Christ.

The experience of Jesus Christ – state the Pope – can not be limited to the pure intellectual realm. This « also includes a renewed ability: (... that) to allow ourselves to be "amazed" by reality, whose truth can be discovered by uniting understanding with love ».

This « realism of faith » express itself above all in the saints, privileged witnesses of the Truth and of Love. But also a quivering plea for witness the is addressed by the Pope to all believers, particularly – among them – to professors, who are called « are called to embody the virtue of *intellectual charity*, recovering their primordial vocation to train future generations not only by imparting knowledge but » also « by the prophetic witness of their own lives ».

Of Course a Christian animation project like this for the future of humanism can not be achieved without a cooperation between professors and students, and between the different topics, Including – in a special way – the theological research. In this way, as well as to recover the question of the « laboratories » of culture and faith, the Pope suggests: « an active network of university instructors committed to bringing the light of the Gospel to contemporary culture » (Speech of 23rd June 2007).

## **Conclusion**

Ending these three Pope's instances, intended to renew our presence « as Christians in University », we can refer to an illuminating passage of the more recent Encyclical *Spe salvi*, where Benedict remind us that « It is not science that redeems man: man is redeemed by love ». « If this absolute love exists » and actually is like that, « with its absolute certainty, then—only then—is man “redeemed”, whatever should happen to him in his particular circumstances » (n. 26).

Come back the instance, absolutely priority, not « to place nothing before the love of Christ ».

For a new humanism it is necessary to renew the authentic hierarchy of values, under the banner of the meeting with the Risen Lord. Only iin this way our Universities can get excited over a new hope.