

**Text of Pope Benedict XVI's Speech at Blessing Ceremony for Foundation Stone
of Madaba University, Jordan**
9 May 2009

Dear Brother Bishops,
Dear friends,

It is for me a great joy to bless this foundation stone of the University of Madaba. I thank His Beatitude Archbishop Fouad Twal, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, for his kind words of welcome. I wish to extend a special greeting of recognition to His Beatitude, Emeritus Patriarch Michel Sabbah, to whose initiative and efforts, together with those of Bishop Salim Sayegh, this new institution owes so much. I also greet the civil authorities, the Bishops, priests, religious and faithful and all who accompany us for this important ceremony.

The Kingdom of Jordan has rightly given priority to the task of extending and improving education. I am aware that in this noble mission Her Majesty Queen Rania is especially active and her commitment is an inspiration to many. As I pay tribute to the efforts of so many people of good will committed to education, I note with satisfaction the competent and expert participation of Christian institutions, especially Catholic and Orthodox, in this overall effort. It is against this background that the Catholic Church, with the support of the Jordanian authorities, has sought to further university education in this country and elsewhere. This present initiative also responds to the request of many families who, pleased with the formation received in schools run by religious authorities, are demanding an analogous option at the university level.

I commend the promoters of this new institution for their courageous confidence in good education as a stepping-stone for personal development and for peace and progress in the region. In this context the University of Madaba will surely keep in mind three important objectives. By developing the talents and noble attitudes of successive generations of students, it will prepare them to serve the wider community and raise its living standards. By transmitting knowledge and instilling in students a love of truth, it will greatly enhance their adherence to sound values and their personal freedom. Finally, this same intellectual formation will sharpen their critical skills, dispel ignorance and prejudice, and assist in breaking the spell cast by ideologies old and new. The result of this process will be a university that is not only a platform for consolidating adherence to truth and to the values of a given culture, but a place of understanding and dialogue. While assimilating their own heritage, young Jordanians and other students from the region will be led to a deeper knowledge of human cultural achievements, will be enriched by other viewpoints, and formed in comprehension, tolerance and peace.

This “broader” education is what one expects from institutions of higher learning and from their cultural milieu, be it secular or religious. In fact, belief in God does not suppress the search for truth; on the contrary it encourages it. Saint Paul exhorted the early Christians to open their minds to “all that is true, all that is noble, all that is good and pure, all that we love and honor, all that is considered excellent or worthy of praise” (Phil 4:8). Religion, of course, like science and technology, philosophy and all

expressions of our search for truth, can be corrupted. Religion is disfigured when pressed into the service of ignorance or prejudice, contempt, violence and abuse. In this case we see not only a perversion of religion but also a corruption of human freedom, a narrowing and blindness of the mind. Clearly, such an outcome is not inevitable. Indeed, when we promote education, we proclaim our confidence in the gift of freedom. The human heart can be hardened by the limits of its environment, by interests and passions. But every person is also called to wisdom and integrity, to the basic and all-important choice of good over evil, truth over dishonesty, and can be assisted in this task.

The call to moral integrity is perceived by the genuinely religious person, since the God of truth and love and beauty cannot be served in any other way. Mature belief in God serves greatly to guide the acquisition and proper application of knowledge. Science and technology offer extraordinary benefits to society and have greatly improved the quality of life of many human beings. Undoubtedly this is one of the hopes of those who are promoting this University, whose motto is *Sapientia et Scientia*. At the same time the sciences have their limitations. They cannot answer all the questions about man and his existence. Indeed the human person, his place and purpose in the universe cannot be contained within the confines of science. “Humanity’s intellectual nature finds its perfection ultimately in wisdom, which gently draws the human mind to seek and to love what is true and good” (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 15). The use of scientific knowledge needs the guiding light of ethical wisdom. Such is the wisdom that inspired the Hippocratic Oath, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Geneva Convention and other laudable international codes of conduct. Hence religious and ethical wisdom, by answering questions of meaning and value, play a central role in professional formation. And consequently, those universities where the quest for truth goes hand in hand with the search for what is good and noble, offer an indispensable service to society.

With these thoughts in mind, I encourage in a special way the Christian students of Jordan and the neighboring regions, to dedicate themselves responsibly to a proper professional and moral formation. You are called to be builders of a just and peaceful society composed of peoples of various religious and ethnic backgrounds. These realities – I wish to stress once more – must lead, not to division, but to mutual enrichment. The mission and the vocation of the University of Madaba is precisely to help you participate more fully in this noble task.

Dear friends, I wish to renew my congratulations to the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and my encouragement to all who have taken this project to heart, together with those who are already engaged in the educational apostolate in this nation. May the Lord bless you and sustain you. I pray that your dreams may soon come true, that you may see generations of qualified men and women Christian, Muslim and of other religions, taking their place in society, equipped with professional skills, knowledgeable in their field, and educated in the values of wisdom, integrity, tolerance and peace. Upon you and upon all the future students and staff of this University and their families, I invoke Almighty God’s abundant blessings!