

LAJOS VÉKÁS

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Magnifice Rector,
Honourable Senate,
Honourable Festive Assembly,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much for finding me worthy of this high decoration. My merits are too modest to deserve it. I can only be grateful to fate for allowing me to do, over a lifetime, what my skills and disposition have made me the most suitable to: teaching young people. Another reason for being thankful to fate is that I have had the opportunity to work in a period of historical upheaval as an instructor at this University under the protective shield of Hungary's premier institution of higher learning. I sincerely hope that the compromises I have had to make have not tarnished my integrity.

Honourable Festive Assembly,

The scholarship of private law has been developed by an untold number of generations of legal practitioners over the past two and a half thousand years. Passing such knowledge on to successive generations of young people is an extremely responsible and rewarding task. Working as a teacher is a calling at a university, just as elsewhere! The way university instructors work serves as an example for their students. I have used every opportunity to open my students' eyes to the difference between divine order and human law and, as for the latter, to remind them of their duty to have a questioning mind. To achieve that, I occasionally told them of the results of social psychology experiments; literary and historical parables.

I have returned the numerous privileges the University bestowed on me by remaining loyal to it. Apart from serving as a visiting professor elsewhere for limited periods, over nearly half a century I have worked here. I remained loyal even when attractive job offers beckoned. I understand those who decided otherwise, especially those former colleagues who in recent years have stood their ground in senior positions, worked arduously and made a remarkable service to our homeland.

On many occasions though I felt like Gottfried Keller. As he put it:

Und wie die müde Danaide wohl,
Das Sieb gesenkt, neugierig um sich blicket,
So schau ich euch verwundert nach,
Besorgt, wie ihr euch fügt und schicket!

Since 1963 I have been a loyal member of the venerable Department of Civil Law, and over a period of twenty years, between 1979 and 1999, I served as its head. It is with gratitude I think of my late professors, Miklós Világgy and Gyula Eörsi, both of whom taught me a great deal professionally and how to live in the world. I have affectionate memories of my late, distinguished colleagues and friends: László Asztalos, György Boytha, Endre Lontai, Vilmos Peschka and Imre Sárándi; and those who are still active: Attila Harmathy, Ferenc Mádl, András Sajó, László Sólyom and Emilia Weiss. With those persons we built a unique intellectual community. I have learned a lot from each of them. I attach high hopes to the young and middle-aged members of the staff of the Department (some of whom were my students).

Honourable Festive Assembly,

I consider it a special gift of life that for three years as from 1990 I could serve my Alma Mater as rector. Those years were far from being easy: the University had to handle serious moral dilemmas, address challenges in the standards of education and overcome financial problems. As rector I did everything in my power to ensure that - despite the difficulties - the creative potentials of our students, fellow instructors and colleagues should unfold and I strove to represent the University worthy of its value within and outside Hungary.

I wish I was wrong when I observe that after twenty years the problems have not gone. But as I cannot tell that for certain, it would not be justified to close my speech with the famous words of Oedipus by Sophocles. Let me therefore finish my speech with a quotation from Ovid:

Believe me, who has not attracted the notice of the world has lived well;
and every one ought to keep within his own proper sphere.

Magnifice Rector,
Honourable Senate,

Let me once again express my heartfelt thanks for this high honour.
Thank you.