

WORDS OF WELCOME FOR THE NEW DOCTOR MARGARET GELLER

Dear Margaret Geller, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Rovira i Virgili University, General Secretary of the Rovira i Virgili University, Dr. Sanromà, members of the University Senate, Councillor for the Environment and Culture of the Tarragona City Council, Councillor for Citizen Relations and the Information Society, distinguished authorities, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great satisfaction for the University to welcome Margaret Geller as an honorary doctor of the Rovira i Virgili University in this solemn ceremony of investiture.

It is my honour and privilege to welcome Dr. Geller to our University Senate. And I do so with great pleasure on behalf of myself and all the members of the University, and particularly of the Department of Computer Engineering and Mathematics, which first proposed that she be awarded the University's maximum academic distinction.

In his *laudatio*, her sponsor, the lecturer Manel Sanromà, has focused on all the academic and scientific merits that make her deserving of such a distinction, and we have all been able to appreciate these merits in her *magistralis lectio*.

The nomination as honorary doctor is, in fact, a twofold distinction: it is the maximum acknowledgement of a distinguished person but also a source of great pride for the University community of which she is now a part. For the URV it is a privilege to have one of the leading scientists in the field of astronomy as a member of the Senate, one of the pioneers in the mapping of the universe on a large scale. In 1989 she revolutionized knowledge on the Universe by discovering one of its largest structures, in fact the second largest known to humankind: the so-called Great Wall, a cluster of galaxies that occupies a surface area measuring 500 by 300 million light years and which is some 15 million light years thick. How many people in the world can understand such a magnitude? The study of the large-scale structure of the universe and the distribution of the elusive dark matter are the main tasks that she carries out as the scientific director of the Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics.

As we have been told by Dr. Sanromà, the award today is the recognition of Dr. Geller's work in the framework of the UNESCO International Year of Astronomy, a global celebration of astronomy and its contribution to society, culture, and the development of humanity. The main objective is to encourage people the world over to rethink their place in the universe through a whole series of discoveries, initiated 400 years ago when Galileo Galilei, as if with a scalpel, first opened up the sky with a telescope.

Our University has decided to celebrate the year in a special way: dedicating it to science and the humanities because Galileo's anniversary coincides—among other events—with the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin, the centenary of the shooting of the pedagogue Ferrer i Guàrdia and the events known as the *Setmana Tràgica* (Tragic Week), and the 60th anniversary of the death of Rovira i Virgili. We have organized a variety of activities, many of which focus on astronomy: astronomical observations, debates on Roman mythology and astronomy, activities based on the Julian calendar and symposia on the Mediterranean and other civilizations that were the forerunners of astronomy. This year too we have created the chair in Science and Humanism precisely to strengthen the integration of knowledge generated by the University and which now, in the specialized society of the 21st century, is more important than ever before.

It is in the age of communication that there is most disinformation. In an age of enormous scientific and technological advances, the basis of the welfare society, and the globalization of cultural conflicts, it is increasingly necessary to work hard at spreading the values of science and the scientific method from a transdisciplinary perspective, because it is only well-founded knowledge and free and critical thought that can shed enough light for collective decisions to be taken in the democratic society that we would like to spread the world over. Dr. Geller has also been involved in this essential task of spreading knowledge, particularly through her work in astronomy.

As her sponsor has pointed out, Dr. Geller's work combines a concern for the greatest magnitudes imaginable and the comparatively contemptible time scale in which our lives run their course; not to beat about the bush, "life's short", says Dr. Geller, as all humanity has said in one way or another. The confluence between science and humanism with which we have celebrated the International Year of Astronomy at the URV lies in this concern for immensity from our small temporal slot.

Dr. Margaret Geller, however, also represents other symbols that we wish for our institution. She has actively defended the rights of minorities, particularly women in science; perhaps one of the reasons for this is the fact that she was the first woman from the Senate of the University of Harvard to be admitted to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Whatever the case may be, we at the URV are working not only to make women's contributions to science and technology more visible but also to disseminate the work of teams led by women in all fields of scientific research. The Equality Plan 2007-2010 passed by this Senate is based on this work.

This investiture ceremony is also one more symbol of the University's firm commitment to the advancement and improvement of society.

Dr. Margaret Geller, thank you for accepting our distinction, which honours us more than it honours you; your belonging to the University Senate enhances the prestige of the Rovira i Virgili University and obliges us strive to be worthy of this prestige.

Today you have received the maximum recognition of your merits and, in return, you must represent the Rovira i Virgili University. I am sure you will do so with affection. I would like to congratulate you on my own behalf and on behalf of the whole university community, of which, from this very moment, you are now a part.

Thank you very much.