



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY
OF THE SACRED HEART***

Thursday, 9 November 2000

*Rector Magnificent,
Distinguished Deans, Professors, Doctors and Assistants,
Dear Students!*

1. It is a great joy for me to be able to meet you once again, as if to repay the visit that you made to me on 13 April last in St Peter's Basilica, when the Catholic University wished solemnly to celebrate its Jubilee.

On this solemn occasion I am meeting the entire community of the Catholic University. I therefore sincerely greet not only all of you here present, but also those from the other branches of the university - in Milan, Brescia and Piacenza - who are linked with us. I extend a special greeting to Cardinal Camillo Ruini, my Vicar General for the Diocese of Rome and President of the Italian Episcopal Conference, as well as to the other dignitaries and civil and religious authorities who have gifted us with their presence. I sincerely thank Mr Emilio Colombo, President of the Toniolo Institute, and Professor Sergio Zaninelli, Rector Magnificent of the University, for the noble words that they addressed to me.

2. I have come to celebrate with you two significant 80th anniversaries: that of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart and that of the Giuseppe Toniolo Institute for Higher Studies, to which Fr Gemelli, the zealous Franciscan who is responsible for your origins, entrusted the foundation of the Catholic University itself and the task of becoming in time its support and guarantor. Judging from the vitality that the University has shown in these 80 years, that task has been carried out effectively. The very naming of the Institute after the Ven. Toniolo, who prepared the time and the groundwork of the University by a life that was entirely spent in the cause of

"Christian culture", served as a programmatic direction put in the genetic code of this University.

Dedicated with holy courage to the Sacred Heart, it has existed since then to show the close harmony of faith and reason, and at the same time to train professionals and scientists who know how to achieve a synthesis between the Gospel and culture, while striving to make their cultural efforts a way of holiness.

3. Culture and holiness! We must not be afraid, when saying these two words, of pairing them unduly. On the contrary, these two dimensions, if well understood, meet at the roots, they unite with naturalness on their journey, they join together in the final goal.

They meet at the roots! Is God, the thrice Holy (cf. Is 6: 3), not the source of all light for our intellect? Behind our every cultural achievement, if we go to the bottom of things, the mystery appears. Every created reality, in fact, points beyond itself to the One who is its ultimate source and foundation. Man, then, precisely when he is investigating and learning, recognizes his creaturely status, experiences an ever new wonder at the Creator's inexhaustible gifts and reaches out with his intellect and will to the infinite and the absolute. An authentic culture cannot fail to bear the mark of that healthy restlessness so wonderfully described by St Augustine in the beginning of his *Confessions*: "You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you" (*Conf.*, I, 1).

4. Therefore, cultural commitment and spiritual commitment, far from excluding one another or from being in tension with each other, mutually sustain one other. The intellect certainly has its laws and its method, but it has everything to gain from the holiness of the person who is searching. Holiness, in fact, puts the scholar in a condition of greater interior freedom, enriches his effort with meaning, supports his work with the contribution of those moral virtues that mould authentic and mature people. Man cannot be divided! If the ancient motto "*mens sana in corpore sano*" has value, then with all the more reason we can say: "*mens sana in vita sancta*". The love of God, with faithful obedience to his commandments, does not stifle but exalts the power of the intellect, fostering the journey towards truth. *Culture and holiness* are therefore the "winning" combination for creating that *complete humanism* of which Christ, revealer of God and revealer of man to himself (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 22), is the supreme model. The halls of the Catholic University must serve as a skilled laboratory for this humanism.

5. In this regard, it is providential that my meeting with you coincides with the 10th anniversary of the Apostolic Constitution *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, signed by me on 15 August 1990. In it, as you well know, I outlined the essential characteristics of a Catholic university, calling it a "primary and privileged place for a fruitful dialogue between the Gospel and culture" (ibid, n. 43). Allow me to present this document to you again, entrusting it to you for careful and attentive reading, so that your University, by fully honouring the insight of its founder, may ever better embody this ideal. It does not separate you from the network of other universities, and even less from a constructive

dialogue with civil society, but asks that you be present with a specific contribution, while staying anchored to the Christian and ecclesial requirements of your identity. Be disciples of truth to the core, even when this may cost misunderstanding and loneliness. The word of God is decisive: "The truth will make you free" (Jn 8: 32).

6. It is precisely within this perspective that I find highly significant what you wished to undertake today with two initiatives that give me great pleasure. I am thinking first of all of the new Paul VI International Scientific Institute for Research on Human Fertility and Infertility, which your University has decided to establish precisely at this Polyclinic, as the Rector Magnificent just announced. The Institute intends to bring together skilled researchers working on these delicate problems so that more and more effective solutions can be found in conformity with the sexual and procreative ethics constantly affirmed by the Magisterium.

In this same spirit, I deeply appreciate the witness that the Catholic University wished to give today with the document signed by some of your distinguished teachers on the subject *Scientific Development and Respect for Man*, with specific reference to the problem of the use of human embryos in stem-cell research. In issues such as these, it is not just some peculiar aspect of culture that is at stake, but a complex set of values, research and behaviour on which the future of mankind and civilization greatly depend.

7. Continue, dear teachers and students, in this impassioned journey of research that is always rigorous from the scientific standpoint, but at the same time is attentive to the ethical dimension, the requirements of faith and human advancement.

I particularly hope that this commitment will also translate into a tenor of academic life that is always able to combine intellectual commitment with that of an authentic Christian experience. Universities are not meant only to increase knowledge, but to form the person. This educational task must never be undervalued. After all, even the transmission of the truth has everything to gain from a climate of human relations marked by values of sincerity, friendship, generosity and mutual respect. I am convinced that, if teachers aspire to being true "*educators*", they must be so not only as teachers of doctrine, but also as "*teachers of life*". For all this you have behind you a rich tradition of witnesses to imitate. In this regard, I was struck by a point which Toniolo entered in his spiritual diary: "*To have the greatest care of my pupils, treating them as a sacred trust, as friends of my heart, to be guided in the ways of the Lord*" (G. Toniolo, *Voglio farmi santo*, Rome, 1995, p. 60). It is from witnesses such as these that you must draw your inspiration. I am delighted then at the thought that in a few days in this Polyclinic, which is especially dear to me also because of what it has meant in difficult moments of my life, the new chapel will be dedicated to the holy physician Giuseppe Moscati. May his example be a constant guide for you, a concrete ideal of life: many physicians like him should emerge from the halls of the Catholic University!

8. I now turn to you, dear students, with special affection. The beginning of the academic year

offers you an occasion to reflect on the meaning of your study in order to strengthen its Christian outlook to the advantage of your future service to society. You will be tomorrow's leaders, the cultural, social and health-care workers of the decades to come. Apply yourselves with love to the toil of your studies and research; do not limit yourselves to dreaming about professional success however legitimate, but look to the beauty of the service that you can render for the building of a more just and united society. You future physicians, in particular, prepare yourselves not only with the most rigorous scientific skill, but also with a human manner that can meet the deep expectations of the patient and his family, a manner that enables the suffering person to understand the mysterious and redeeming dimension of pain. Learn from now on to treat the sick as Jesus himself did!

I, too, experienced similar treatment here at the Gemelli Hospital. And I cannot fail to recall the late Prof. Crucitti and so many other professors, as well as the late Sr Ausilia. *Requiescant in pace.*

9. Dear family of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart! Eighty years have passed since the dream of Fr Gemelli began to be realized. This reality was gradually consolidated, so that today it appears majestic not only in its dimensions, but also in the variety and quality of its services. Catholic Italy can be proud of you. But I know that the entire country looks at you with respect and appreciation. Great is your tradition, great also is the task that awaits you! Today you are facing the challenges in an historical period of change, in which adaptations and innovations even in university structures are necessary. May you achieve them with courage and intelligence, without ever betraying the spirit that has always inspired you.

Once again I entrust this journey to the Blessed Virgin *Sedes Sapientiae*, imploring her maternal protection over you, your loved ones and your work. With these sentiments I sincerely impart my Apostolic Blessing to all.

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