



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON
"GLOBALIZATION AND THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY"**

Thursday, 5 December 2002

Your Eminences,

Mr President of the International Federation of Catholic Universities,

Rectors and Professors of the Catholic Universities,

Dear Friends,

1. I am pleased to offer you a cordial greeting and to express to you my appreciation for the cultural and evangelizing activity of Catholic universities throughout the world. Your presence gives me the opportunity to address the academic staff, the personnel and students of your institutions, who together make up the university community. Today's meeting fondly recalls to me the years in which I took part in university education.

I thank Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski for expressing your affection and also for illustrating the motives and prospects that guide the activities of research and teaching that take place in your universities.

2. Organized jointly by the Congregation for Catholic Education and the International Federation of Catholic Universities, your congress on the theme *Globalization and the Catholic University* is particularly timely. It highlights the fact that in their reflection the Catholic university must always pay attention to the changes of society in order to formulate fresh reflections.

The institution of the university was born in the heart of the Church in the great European cities of Paris, Bologna, Salamanca, Padua, Oxford, Coimbra, Rome, Krakow, Prague, highlighting the Church's role in the field of teaching and research. It was around men who were both theologians and humanists, that higher education was organized not just in theology and philosophy but also in

the majority of profane disciplines. Today Catholic universities continue to have an important role on the international scientific scene and they are called to take an active part in researching and developing knowledge for the promotion of the human person and the good of humanity.

3. New scientific issues require great prudence and serious, rigorous study; they pose many challenges, both to the scientific community and to those who must make decisions, especially in the areas of politics and law. I encourage you to be vigilant, to discern in scientific and technical progress and in globalization what is promising for the human person and humanity, but also the dangers they entail for the future. Among the topics that deserve special attention, I would like to point out those that relate directly to the dignity of the person and his fundamental rights, with which the important issues of bioethics are closely connected, such as the status of the human embryo and of stem cells, today the object of experiments and disturbing manipulation, not always moral or scientifically justified.

4. Globalization is most often the result of economic factors, which today more than ever shape political, legal and bioethical decisions, frequently to the detriment of human and social concerns. The university world should strive to analyze the factors underlying these decisions and should in turn contribute to making them truly moral acts, acts worthy of the human person. This means strongly emphasizing the centrality of the inalienable dignity of the human person in scientific research and in social policies. Through their activities, the professors and students of your institutions are called to bear clear witness to their faith before the scientific community, showing their commitment to the truth and their respect for the human person. For Christians, research must in effect be undertaken in the light of faith rooted in prayer, in listening to the word of God, in Tradition and in the teaching of the Magisterium.

5. The role of universities is to train men and women in the different disciplines, taking care to show the profound structural connection between faith and reason, "the two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth" (*Fides et Ratio*, n. 1). It should not be forgotten that a true education ought to present a complete and transcendent vision of the human person and educate people's consciences. I am aware of your efforts, in teaching the secular disciplines, to transmit to your students a Christian humanism and to present to them in their university curriculum the basic elements of philosophy, bioethics and theology; this will confirm their faith and inform their consciences (cf. *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, n. 15).

6. The Catholic university must exercise its mission by being careful to maintain its Christian identity and by taking part in the life of the local Church. While preserving its own scientific autonomy, it has the mission of living the teaching of the Magisterium in the various areas of research in which it is involved. The Apostolic Constitution *Ex corde Ecclesiae* stresses this twofold mission: a university is "an academic community which, in a rigorous and critical fashion, assists in the protection and advancement of human dignity and of the cultural heritage, through research, teaching and various services offered" (n. 12). Since it is Catholic, it manifests its identity

based on the Catholic faith by its fidelity to the teachings and orientations of the Church, ensuring "a Christian presence in the university world, confronting the great problems of society and culture" (n. 13). In fact, it is the responsibility of each teacher or researcher, and of the whole university community and of the institution itself, to live this obligation as a service to the Gospel, the Church, and the human person. As their area of concern, the authorities of the university have the duty to be sure of the rectitude and the upholding of Catholic principles in the teaching and research going on in their institution. It is clear that university centres that do not observe the law of the Church and the teaching of the Magisterium, especially in the matter of bioethics, cannot be considered as having the character of a Catholic university. I therefore invite each person and each university to assess his/her way of living the fidelity to the characteristic principles of Catholic identity, and, as a consequence, to make the decisions that are required.

7. At the end of our meeting, I would like to express to you my confidence and my encouragement. The Catholic universities are of great value for the Church. They fulfil a mission in the service of the understanding of the faith and the development of understanding; they tirelessly create bridges between scientists in all the disciplines. They are called ever more to be places of dialogue with the whole of the university world, so that cultural formation and research may be at the service of the common good and of the human person, who cannot be considered a mere object of research.

As I entrust you to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, of St Thomas Aquinas and of all the Doctors of the Church, I impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to the persons and institutions you represent.