



# The Holy See

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***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR  
AT THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF THE SACRED HEART***

*Friday, 25 November 2005*

*Rector Magnificent,  
Distinguished Presidents and Professors,  
Doctors and Auxiliaries,  
Dear Students,*

I am very pleased to visit the Rome campus of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart to officially inaugurate the Academic Year 2005-2006. My thoughts turn at this moment to the other branches of the Athenaeum: to the main one in Milan, near the beautiful Basilica of St Ambrose, and to the ones in Brescia, Piacenza-Cremona and Campobasso.

I would like the whole family of the "Catholic University" to feel united beneath God's gaze at this moment, at the beginning of the new stretch on its journey of commitment to science and training.

With us here in spirit are Fr Gemelli and all the other men and women who forged the history of the Athenaeum with their enlightened dedication. We also feel the Popes close to us, from Benedict XV to John Paul II, who always had special ties with this University. My Visit today, in fact, is in continuity with the Visit my venerable Predecessor made five years ago to this seat of learning and for the same occasion.

I address a cordial greeting to Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi, President of the Toniolo Institute, and to the Rector Magnificent, Prof. Lorenzo Ornaghi, and I thank them both for their courteous words to me on behalf of all those present.

I extend my greeting with respect to the other distinguished religious and civil figures who have

gathered here, particularly Sen. Emilio Colombo, who has been a member of the Permanent Committee of the Toniolo Institute for 48 years and its President from 1986 to 2003. I offer him my deep gratitude for all he has done to serve the University.

While we are gathered here, distinguished and dear friends, we cannot but think of the moments filled with anxiety and emotion that we lived through during John Paul II's last stays as a patient at this Polyclinic. In those days, the thoughts of Catholics in every part of the world - and not only Catholics - were focused on the Gemelli Hospital.

From his two hospital rooms, the Pope imparted an incomparable lesson to all on the Christian meaning of life and suffering, witnessing in the first person to the truth of the Christian message. I therefore desire to express once again my grateful appreciation, and that of countless people, for the solicitous care offered to the Holy Father. May he obtain heavenly rewards for each one.

Today, the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart has about 40,000 students enrolled in its five branches and 14 Faculties. The thought: "what a responsibility!" springs spontaneously to mind. Thousands and thousands of young people pass through the halls of the "Catholic University". How do they leave it? What culture did they encounter, assimilate or work out?

This is the great challenge, which concerns in the first place the group that directs the Athenaeum, the teaching Staff, hence, the students themselves: to give life to an authentic Catholic University that excels in the quality of its research and teaching and, at the same time, its fidelity to the Gospel and the Church's Magisterium.

In this regard, it is providential that the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart is structurally linked to the Holy See through the Toniolo Institute for Advanced Studies, whose task it was and is to guarantee the attainment of the institutional goals of this Athenaeum for Italian Catholics. This original definition, always confirmed by my Predecessors, collegially guarantees that the University is firmly anchored to the Chair of Peter and to the patrimony of values bequeathed as a legacy by the Founders. To all members of this praiseworthy Institution, I offer my heartfelt thanks.

So, let us return to the question: what culture? I am delighted that the Rector, in his presentation, placed the emphasis on the original and ever up to date "mission" of the Catholic University, that is, to undertake scientific research and teaching activities in accordance with a consistent cultural and formative project, at the service of the young generations and the human and Christian development of society.

In this regard, the patrimony of teaching that Pope John Paul II bequeathed to us, which culminated in his Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* of 1990, is of great value. He always showed that the "Catholic" identity is in no way reductive but rather exalts the University.

Indeed, if the fundamental mission of every university is "a continuous quest for the truth through its research, and the preservation and communication of knowledge for the good of society" (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, n. 30), a Catholic academic community is distinguished by the Christian inspiration of individuals and of the University Community itself, in the light of the faith that illuminates thought, for the fidelity to the Christian message as it is presented by the Church and for the institutional commitment to the service of the People of God (cf. *ibid.*, n. 13).

The Catholic University is therefore a vast laboratory where, in accordance with the different disciplines, ever new areas of research are developed in a stimulating confrontation between faith and reason that aims to recover the harmonious synthesis achieved by Thomas Aquinas and other great Christian thinkers, a synthesis that is unfortunately challenged by important currents of modern philosophy.

The consequence of this contestation has been that, as a criterion of rationality, empirical proof by experimentation has become ever more exclusive. The fundamental human questions - how to live and how to die - thus appear to be excluded from the context of rationality and are left to the sphere of subjectivity.

Consequently, the issue that brought universities into being - the question of the true and the good - in the end disappears to be replaced by the question of feasibility.

This then is the great challenge to Catholic Universities: to impart knowledge in the perspective of true rationality, different from that of today which largely prevails, in accordance with a reason open to the question of the truth and to the great values inscribed in being itself, hence, open to the transcendent, to God.

We now know that this is possible precisely in the light of the revelation of Christ, who united in himself God and man, eternity and time, spirit and matter. "In the beginning was the Word", the Logos, creative reason... and "the Word became flesh" (Jn 1: 1, 14).

The divine *Logos*, eternal reason, is the origin of the universe and was united once and for all with humanity, the world and history, in Christ. In the light of this capital truth of faith and of reason at the same time, it was once again possible, in 2000, to combine faith and knowledge.

The daily work of a Catholic University, I should say, takes place on this basis. Is this not an exciting adventure? Yes, it is, because one discovers, moving within this horizon of meaning, the intrinsic unity that links the different branches of knowledge: theology, philosophy, medicine, economics, every discipline, even the most specialized technologies, since everything is connected.

Choosing a Catholic University means choosing this approach which, despite the inevitable

historical limitations, characterizes the European culture, for whose formation the Universities were, not for nothing, born historically "*ex corde Ecclesiae*" [from the heart of the Church] and have made a fundamental contribution.

Therefore, dear friends, with renewed passion for the truth and for human beings, cast your nets into the deep, into the open seas of knowledge, trusting in Christ's words, even when it happens that you experience the exhaustion and disappointment of having "caught" nothing.

In the vast ocean of culture Christ always needs "fishers of men", that is, knowledgeable and well-qualified people who put their professional skills at the service of good, ultimately at the service of the Kingdom of God.

If research work in a university is carried out in a faith perspective, it is also part of this service to the Kingdom and to humankind! I am thinking of all the research work being carried out in the many Institutes of the Catholic University: it is destined to the glory of God and to the spiritual and material promotion of humanity.

At this moment, I am thinking in particular of the Scientific Institute that your Athenaeum wished to offer to Pope John Paul II on 9 November 2000, on the occasion of his Visit here to solemnly inaugurate the academic year.

I should like to state that I also have very much at heart the "Paul VI International Scientific Institute for Research on Human Fertility and Infertility" for responsible procreation (cf. *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 22 November 2000, p. 7). Indeed, because of its institutional goals, it is presented as an eloquent example of that synthesis of truth and love which constitutes the vital centre of Catholic culture.

The Institute, which came into being in response to the appeal launched by Pope Paul VI in the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, suggested giving a stable scientific basis both to the natural regulation of human fertility and to the commitment to overcome possible infertility using natural methods.

As I make my own my venerable Predecessor's grateful appreciation for this scientific initiative, I hope that it will be able to find the support it needs to carry out its important research activities.

Distinguished Professors and dear students, the Academic Year we are inaugurating today is the 85th in the history of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart. In fact, lessons began in Milan in December 1921, with 100 students enrolled in the two faculties of social sciences and philosophy.

As I thank the Lord with you for the long and fruitful journey completed, I urge you to stay faithful to the spirit of the beginnings as well as to the Statutes on which this Institution is founded. You will thus be able to achieve a fruitful and harmonious synthesis between Catholic identity and full

insertion into the Italian university system, in accordance with the project of Giuseppe Toniolo and Fr Agostino Gemelli.

This is the hope that I address to all of you today: continue to build the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart day by day, with enthusiasm and with joy. I accompany you in this task with my prayers and with a special Apostolic Blessing.

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