



The Holy See

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

Thursday 13 April 2000

Brothers and Sisters of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart!

1. I extend a most cordial welcome to all of you. I first greet the Rector Magnificent, Prof. Sergio Zaninelli, whose noble address I listened to attentively, appreciating his clear description of the fundamental values that 80 years ago inspired the foundation of the Catholic University and which must continue to guide the life of all who are part of it today.

I greet Cardinal Angelo Sodano, who celebrated Holy Mass for you; I greet the President, and the other members of the Toniolo Institute, the pro-rectors, deans and teachers. I also greet you, dear students, and the administrative, auxiliary and support staff, both those in service and those retired, the friends of the university and everyone who, in various ways, makes up your large family.

2. Together you have come from the branches in Milan, Rome, Brescia and Piacenza to make your Jubilee pilgrimage. It is occurring at the end of the 40th anniversary of the death of Fr Agostino Gemelli and on the eve of the celebrations for the 80th anniversary of your athenaeum, which opened in December 1920. Others had desired it and prepared it in advance. I am thinking in particular of Prof. Giuseppe Toniolo, whose name is significantly linked to your founding body. But it was Fr Gemelli who achieved this work, of which Italian Catholics are so proud.

Its coincidence with the imminent anniversary gives your pilgrimage a particular feature: it spurs you to rediscover your roots. And how can we forget, in the context of the Holy Year, that a grace of "conversion" was at the origin of your institution? It was by discovering Christ in the intensity of the Franciscan tradition that Agostino Gemelli drew the far-sighted wisdom and indomitable courage to create this splendid combination of persons and activities, of study and action, which is

your university.

In coming to celebrate the Jubilee, you are following in the footsteps of your founder and of the many spiritual teachers who have honoured your institution over the years. I remember in particular Prof. Giuseppe Lazzati, Rector of the university in years past, who during the Council made an enlightening contribution to the discussion of several topics. I hope that you will be able to emulate their wisdom and integrity of life.

3. As you well know, a few years ago I addressed the Apostolic Constitution *Ex corde Ecclesiae* to Catholic universities; today, in the light of the Jubilee, it is more timely than ever. I would especially like to remind you of a passage in that Constitution which precisely concerns the deep unity that must exist in a Catholic university between academic activities and pastoral initiatives.

With regard to the latter I wrote: "Pastoral ministry is that activity of the university which offers the members of the university community an opportunity to integrate religious and moral principles with their academic study and non-academic activities, thus integrating faith with life. It is part of the mission of the Church within the university, and is also a constitutive element of a Catholic university itself, both in its structure and in its life. A university community concerned with promoting the institution's Catholic character will be conscious of this pastoral dimension and sensitive to the ways in which it can have an influence on all university activities" (n. 38).

Dear students and teachers, I urge you to pursue with all your energy the ideal that pastoral work is not something to be done along with other things, but a dimension that permeates everything one does, integrating it into the educational programme proper to a Catholic university. In this way the university becomes a great educational community in which students, teachers and technical-administrative personnel work together to achieve the same goal, that of providing the young students with an integral formation worthy of the name.

4. When I speak of "formation", my thoughts naturally turn to the example left us by Jesus the Teacher and recorded for us in the Gospels. Jesus is the "Good Teacher" (cf. *Mk* 10: 17), the teacher gentle and lowly in heart (cf. *Mt* 11: 29), the teacher *par excellence*. We must all be inspired by his teaching if we want to be equal to the task entrusted to us. Jesus' teaching is imbued with wisdom, prudence and patience; it is a teaching attentive to others, capable of interpreting their needs and expectations, ever ready to be challenged by various human situations.

In especially addressing you dear teachers of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, I am concerned to give you a task: be true and authentic teachers; see that you express clearly the educational programme that inspires you, giving an account for the hope that is in you (cf. *1 Pt* 3: 15) as true disciples of Christ. Make it your commitment and honour to offer to the Church and the country professionally well-trained young people, politically sensitive citizens and, in particular,

enlightened and courageous Christians.

5. During your pilgrimage you have passed through the Holy Door, a symbol of Christ who opens the way for man to enter into a life of communion with God. To enter through this door means to be deeply converted to Christ in one's thoughts and in one's life. One's cultural commitment itself is inwardly affected by this decision.

Christian scholars, both teachers and students, are distinguished by their ability to combine the rigour of scientific research with the certainty of believing that Jesus Christ, as the eternal Word of God, is Truth in its fullest sense. From this stems their vocation to explore, to analyze and to explain individual truths in the light of Christ, the absolute Truth, and to accompany their studies with prayer and integrity of life. Know that this is your vocation. Never tire of turning your hearts to the only Saviour, to whose Heart your institution is consecrated.

I know that at the moment you are carefully reflecting on what must be done in connection with the imminent reform of the university system; it is a demanding and complex reform, which includes radical innovations. Precisely for this reason the fundamental values of your life and work are challenged. On this occasion too, I am sure that you will not fail to interpret the demands of change wisely, in conformity with the Christian inspiration that characterized your athenaeum and in harmony with the directives of the Magisterium. The tradition of autonomy, which you have always enjoyed, will enable you to carry out the upcoming changes in a way that guarantees that freedom which has always been an essential condition for the growth of knowledge.

Your university is still vitally concerned to foster a close relationship - one that already exists on a broad scale - between your structures and the Church in Italy, starting with fruitful relations with the Italian Episcopal Conference and with the cultural programme it is promoting for an effective presence in the country, in various cultural spheres and especially in the revision of the educational system.

6. Obviously, this specific attention to your identity and to the Church's pastoral care should not be interpreted as cultural isolation, intolerance or a rejection of dialogue. Moreover, within the life of the Christian community of your Catholic university, one must practise the spirit of mutual listening, remembering that the riches of the Christian community lie in the diversity of gifts that the Spirit himself distributes as he wills (cf. 1 *Cor* 12: 11). As for civil society, the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart faces a tremendous challenge today, since it must serve as an areopagus of the different cultures that are becoming interwoven in Italy, as in many other countries of the world. Being "Catholic" commits your university to combining the indispensable demands of ecclesial membership with sincere openness to any serious cultural expression, with critical reflection on the present and future of a society that is becoming multiethnic and multireligious.

7. As each of you lays before the Lord the intentions of your own heart, I repeat to you what I have

said on other occasions: be conscious of what is required of you by being called Catholic, the name that characterizes your university. It does not stifle but exalts your commitment to authentic human values.

Be proud to belong to the "Catholic" university and try to be equal to the responsibilities that this entails. The memory of your tradition requires it; the very nature of your institution calls for it, and the marvellous educational mission entrusted to you demands it.

"Now is the time for great tasks", wrote Fr Gemelli long ago in 1940. "Wherever you are, show that you are aware of your mission. Be flames that burn, that enlighten, that guide, that comfort" (*Foglio agli studenti*, October 1940).

I make this advice my own and offer it to you again, invoking the motherly assistance of Our Lady, *Sedes sapientiae*, on your intentions and initiatives. With these sentiments, I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to everyone here and to all who work in your university.

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