



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS, PROFESSORS AND STUDENTS
OF THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF THE SACRED HEART***

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Saturday, 21 May 2011*

*Your Eminences,
Rector Magnificent,
Distinguished Faculty Members and Representative of the Staff,
Dear Students,*

I am very happy to have this meeting with you, who form the great family of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, born 90 years ago from the joyful insight of Fr Agostino Gemelli and the initiative of the Giuseppe Toniolo Institute for Higher Education, founding and guarantor body of the Athenaeum. I thank Cardinal Tettamanzi and Prof. Ornaghi for their warm words to me in the name of everyone.

Our time is one of intense and rapid change which also reflects on university life; the humanistic culture seems to be affected by a progressive decline, while the so-called “productive” disciplines, such as technological and economic studies, are emphasized. There is a tendency to reduce the human horizon to a measurable level and to eliminate the fundamental question of meaning from systematic and critical knowledge. Contemporary culture tends to exclude religion from rational spaces, to the extent that empirical sciences monopolize territories of reason. There does not seem to be room for reasons to believe; therefore the religious dimension is exiled to the realm of opinion and personal choice. In this context the very purpose and characteristics of the university are radically questioned.

Ninety years after its founding, the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart finds itself at a historical turning point, in which it is important to consolidate and increase the reasons for which it was born,

bringing with it an ecclesial connotation which is made evident by the adjective “Catholic”; the Church, indeed, “expert in humanity” is a promoter of authentic humanism. In this perspective the original vocation of the University emerges, born of the search for the truth, for the whole truth, for the whole truth of our existence. And by its obedience to the truth and to the demands of the knowledge of truth, it becomes a school of *humanitas* where vital understanding is cultivated, where mature character is fashioned and where valuable knowledge and skills are passed on. The Christian perspective does not set itself against scientific knowledge and the conquests of human intelligence; rather it considers faith the horizon of meaning, the way to full truth, the guide for authentic development. Without focusing on the truth, without an attitude of humble and ardent research, every culture crumbles, declines into relativism and loses itself in the ephemeral. Instead, the Christian prospective, pulled from the grip of reductionism which mortifies and circumscribes it, can open itself to an interpretation truly illuminated by what is real, offering an authentic service to life.

Dear friends, faith and culture are permanently connected heights, a manifestation of that *desiderium naturale videndi Deum* which is present in every person. When this union dissolves, humanity tends to fold in on itself and close itself to its own creative capacities. It is then necessary that there should be in the University a genuine passion for the question of the absolute, truth itself, and therefore theological knowledge, which is an integral part of the curriculum in your Athenaeum. Uniting in itself audacity for research and patience for growth, the theological horizon can and should value all the resources of reason. The question of the Truth and the Absolute — the question of God — is not an abstract investigation divorced from daily life, but it is the *crucial question*, on which the discovery of the meaning of the world and of life depends. The Gospel is the basis for a view of the world and the person that does not cease to emanate cultural, humanistic and ethical merits. Therefore, the knowledge of faith enlightens man’s search. This search is rendered human and integrated in works of good, tearing it from the temptation of the calculating thought which exploits knowledge and makes scientific discoveries a means of power and of enslavement to man.

The horizon which invigorates the work of the university can and should be an authentic passion for human beings. Only through service to others is science utilized to till and keep the universe (cf. Gen 2:15). Serving others is living the truth in charity, it is loving life and respecting it, beginning with situations in which it is frail and defenceless. This is our duty, especially in times of crisis: the history of our culture demonstrates how human dignity was truly recognized in its totality to the light of Christian faith. The Catholic University is called to be a place which par excellence shapes that openness to knowledge, that passion for truth, that interest in the history of mankind which characterizes authentic Christian spirituality. Indeed, taking on a closed or detached attitude in the face of a perspective of faith means forgetting that throughout history it has been, and still is, a leaven of culture and light for intelligence, stimulus to develop all positive potentials for the authentic good of human beings. As the [Second Vatican Council](#) stated, faith is able to give light to existence, affirming: “For faith throws a new light on all things and makes known the full ideal

which God has set for man, thus guiding the mind towards solutions that are fully human” (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 11).

The Catholic University is a place where this should occur with particular efficacy, under the scientific and didactic profile. This particular service to the Truth is a gift of grace and qualifying expression of evangelical charity. The demonstration of faith and the testimony of love are inseparable. The profound nucleus of the truth of God, in fact, is the love with which he bends over man, and in Christ, has offered gifts of infinite grace. In Jesus we discover that God is love and that only through love can we know him, as St John said: “For love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God” (1 Jn 4: 7). And as St Augustine states: “*Non intratur in veritatem nisi per caritatem*” (*Contra Faustum*, n. 32).

The summit of the knowledge of God is reached through love; love which goes to the root and is not satisfied with occasional philanthropic expressions, but illumines the meaning of life with the Truth of Christ, who transforms the heart of man and uproots selfishness which cause misery and death. Humans need love, humans need truth in order to not dispel the frail treasure of freedom and to be exposed to the violence of passion and to manipulation, both open and hidden (cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Centesimus annus*, n. 46). The Christian faith does not make love a vague, sympathetic merciful feeling but a force able to illuminate the paths of life in all its expressions. Without this vision, without this primal and profound theological dimension, love is satisfied with occasional help and renounces its prophetic duty to transform the life of the person and the very structures of society. It is this specific task that the mission of the University calls you to fulfil as passionate protagonists, convinced that the power of the Gospel is capable of renewing human relations and penetrating hearts with reality.

Dear young university students of the “Cattolica”, you are a living example of that quality of faith which changes life and saves the world with its problems and hopes, questions and certainties, aspirations and involvement which the desire for a better life produce and which prayer nourishes. Dear representatives of the technical and administrative staff, be proud of the duties that are assigned to you in the context of the large university family in supporting the multi-faceted formative and professional activities. And to you, dear faculty, a decisive role is entrusted to you: to demonstrate how the Christian faith is a leaven of culture and light for intelligence, a stimulus to develop every positive potential for the authentic good of all. That which reason loses sight of, faith enlightens and manifests.

Contemplation of God’s work reveals to knowledge the demand for rational, systematic and critical investigation; the search for God strengthens love for secular arts and sciences: “*Fides ratione adiuvatur et ratio fide perficitur*” as Hugh of St Victor stated (*De sacramentis*, I, III, 30: pl 176, 232).

From this perspective the beating heart and constant nourishment of university life is the chapel, to which the Pastoral Centre is united where the spiritual assistants of the various campuses are

called to perform their precious priestly mission which is essential to the Catholic University's identity. As Bl. John Paul II taught, the chapel "is *a place of the spirit*, where believers in Christ, involved in different ways in academic study, can pause for prayer and find nourishment and direction. It is a *training-ground for the Christian virtues*, where the life received in Baptism grows and systematically develops. It is a *welcoming and open home* for all those who, heeding the voice of the Teacher within, become seekers of the truth and serve mankind by their daily commitment to a knowledge which goes beyond merely narrow and pragmatic goals. In the setting of a modernity in decline, the university chapel is called to be a *vital centre for promoting the Christian renewal of culture*, in respectful and frank dialogue, in a clear and well-grounded viewpoint (cf. IPet 3:15), in a witness which open to questioning and capable of convincing" (*Address to European University Chaplains*, 1 May 1998). Thus said John Paul II in 1998.

Dear friends, may the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, in tune with the goals of the Toniolo Institute, continue on its path with renewed faith, effectively demonstrating that the light of the Gospel is a source of true culture able to spark energies of a new, integral and transcendent humanism. I entrust you to Mary *Sedes Sapientae* and with affection I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.