



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE COUNCIL OF THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION
OF CATHOLIC UNIVERSITIES AND
RECTORS OF CATHOLIC UNIVERSITIES OF EUROPE**

Saturday, 24 February 1979

Dear Brothers and Sons,

Is it necessary to say how happy I am to be again with you, members of the Council of the International Federation of Catholic Universities or Rectors of the Catholic Universities of Europe? The pontifical yearbook of 1978 still named me among the members of the Congregation for Catholic Education, where I became familiar with your problems. I have also kept an excellent memory of my participation in the meeting at Lublin, which you have just recalled so kindly. As for the work of University professor, I quite naturally gauge its interest and importance, after the years I myself spent teaching in the Theological Faculty of Krakow, the most ancient in Poland, at Lublin University

1. You are certainly quite convinced, but I am anxious to stress again that the Catholic Universities have a select place in the Pope's heart, as they must have in the whole Church and in the concerns of her Pastors in the midst of the many activities of their ministry. Dedicated to a work of research and teaching, they have also thereby a sole of witness and an apostolate without which the Church could not fully and durably evangelize the vast world of culture, or simply the rising generations, more and more highly educated, who will also be increasingly demanding to face up to, in faith, the many questions raised by sciences and the various systems of thought. From the first centuries the Church has felt the importance of an apostolate of the intellect

—let it be enough to recall St Justin, St Augustine—and her initiatives are numberless in this field. I do not need to quote the texts of the recent Council which you know by heart. For some time now, the attention of leaders of the Church has rightly been drawn by the spiritual needs of social environments that are quite dechristianized or little christianized: workers, peasants, migrants,

poor people of every kind. It is certainly necessary, and the Gospel makes it a duty for us. But the University world also needs a Church presence more than ever. And, in the specific framework which is yours, you help to provide it.

2. Addressing teachers and students in Mexico recently, I indicated three aims for Catholic University Institutes: to make a specific contribution to the Church and society

—thanks to a really complete study of the different problems—with the concern to show the full significance of man regenerated in Christ and thus permit his complete development; to form pedagogically men who, having made a personal synthesis between faith and culture, will be capable both of keeping their place in society and of bearing witness in it to their faith; to set up, among teachers and students, a real community which already bears witness visibly to a living Christianity.

3. I stress here some fundamental points. Research at the University level presupposes all the loyalty, the seriousness and, for that very reason, the freedom of scientific investigation. It is at this price that you bear witness to the truth, that you serve the Church and society, that you deserve the esteem of the University world; and this in all branches of knowledge.

But when it is a question of man, of the field of human sciences, it is necessary to add the following; if it is right to take advantage of the contribution of the different methodologies, it is not sufficient to choose one, or even make a synthesis of several, to determine what man is in depth. The Christian cannot let himself be hemmed in by them, all the more so in that he is not taken in by their premises. He knows that he must go beyond the purely natural perspective; his faith makes him approach anthropology in the perspective of man's

full vocation and salvation; it is the light beneath which he works, the line that guides his research. In other words, a Catholic University is not only a field of religious research open in all directions. It presupposes in its teachers an anthropology enlightened by faith, consistent with faith, in particular with the Creation and with the Redemption of Christ. In the midst of the swarm of present-day approaches, which too often lead, moreover, to a minimizing of man, Christians have an original role to play, within research and teaching, precisely because they reject any partial vision of man.

As for theological research properly speaking, by definition it cannot exist without seeking its source and its regulation in Scripture and Tradition, in the experience and decisions of the Church handed down by the Magisterium throughout the course of the centuries. These brief reminders mark the specific exigencies of the responsibility of the teaching staff in Catholic Faculties. It is in this sense that Catholic Universities must safeguard their own character. It is in this framework that they bear witness not only before their students, but also before other Universities, to the seriousness with which the Church approaches the world of thought, and, at the same time, to a real understanding of faith.

4. Before this great and difficult mission, collaboration between Catholic Universities of the whole world is highly desirable, for themselves and for the development, in an opportune way, of their relations with the world of culture. This shows all the importance of your Federation. I warmly encourage its initiatives, and in particular the study of the subject of the next Assembly on the ethical problems of the modern technological society. A fundamental subject, to which I am very

sensitive myself, and to which I hope to have the opportunity to return. May the Holy Spirit guide you with his light and give you the necessary strength! May the intercession of Mary keep you available for his action, for the will of God! You know that I remain very close to your concerns and to your work. I willingly give you my Apostolic Blessing.

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