

The 20th anniversary of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross

An address delivered by Cardinal José Saraiva Martins

It is a source of particular satisfaction to me to take part in the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, not only because of my awareness of this university's high scientific level and profound ecclesial sense, but also because I have had occasion to follow closely its still brief but fruitful trajectory during these past twenty years.

My years as a professor and rector of the Pontifical University Urbaniana coincided with the first steps of what is today the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross. It was back in the eighties when I first learned that a group of professors living in Rome were going to begin the departments of theology and canon law under the direction and patronage of the University of Navarre's prestigious schools in those fields. On January 9, 1985, the Congregation for Catholic Education issued the decree by which these two departments were established. And thus was born the Roman Academic Center of the Holy Cross.

In May of 1988, I was appointed secretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education. From that moment on, reports about the Roman Academic Center reached me in a direct and official way. On January 9,

1990, after having verified the development attained by the Roman Academic Center of the Holy Cross, the Congregation promulgated the decree with which it became the Roman Athenaeum of the Holy Cross, establishing not only the school of theology but also that of philosophy, to which was later added the school of canon law. The institution thus took an important step forward in its process of consolidation. Some time later, when I was still in the Congregation for Catholic Education, two other important events took place: the granting by the Holy Father, on June 26, 1995, of the title "Pontifical," and the creation, on February 26, 1996, of the school of social communication.

In May of 1998, John Paul II granted me the honor of being named Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints. The culminating moment in the history of the institution in which we now find ourselves, that is, its elevation to the rank of Pontifical University, thus came to my knowledge more indirectly. Nevertheless, my relationship with the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross has been continual, although from a different perspective. As Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, on October 6, 2002 I had the immense joy of participating in the solemn canonization of St. Josemaría Escrivá, to whose apostolic and priestly zeal we

owe the creation of this university. And a short time ago I was called upon to issue the nihil obstat for the beginning of the process of beatification and canonization of its founder and first Chancellor, the Servant of God, Bishop Alvaro del Portillo.

I could add here some additional considerations, but this is not the moment to speak about myself. Rather I want to focus on the institution whose twentieth anniversary we are celebrating. Therefore, I will dedicate the rest of my talk to some brief remarks about the spirit a university should have, which this institution and its faculty marvelously exemplify.

From the times of its origin, the university has often been the subject of reflection. Thus we have many ancient and modern commentaries that we could use as guidelines for our considerations. On this occasion it seems particularly appropriate to me to use the words that Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo spoke, as Chancellor of the Roman Academic Center, on November 20, 1985, at the opening of its first academic year: "In civil society, the university—with its teaching and research, with its aspiration to penetrate deeply into the sources of wisdom and science—is in the vanguard of mankind's paths. This truth, which is valid for all universities, is so with greater reason for those in which the ecclesiastical disciplines are cultivated. Indeed, the study and teaching of the sacred sciences, always in union with the magisterium of the Church

and under her guidance, opens the path that the Christian should follow and indicates the final goal towards which he should direct his steps." "The Roman Academic Center of the Holy Cross," Msgr. del Portillo continued, "tries to faithfully carry out this ideal."¹

The words just cited, which may stir up moving memories among many who today work at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, indicate the three fundamental points for the configuration of a university that I would now like to briefly comment on: a) the unity between different fields of knowledge; b) the formation of persons; c) service to culture and, from the Christian point of view, the great task of evangelization.

a) *Diversity and dialogue among the sciences*

The diversity of the sciences and, at the same time, the need for a connection among them, has been noted since antiquity, giving rise to profound epistemological reflections—one need only think here of Aristotle. The inspiration of the medieval era was to unite these diverse sciences in a single organization—hence the name *universitas scientiarum*—thus bringing about a reciprocal stimulus. There were of course frequent moments of dissonance and conflict, but the university proved to be not only an effective institution, but also one capable of adapting to very diverse cultural situations. And it has re-

1. Full text [in Italian] in *Romana: Bollettino della Prelatura della Santa Croce e Opus Dei*, 1 (1985)

tained these properties down to our day.

An analysis of the life of the university shows that a determining element for its fruitfulness comes not only from the coexistence of the different fields of knowledge, but also from other factors, of which I would like to point out two. On the one hand, the formation of a community that unites teachers and disciples. On the other, intimately connected with the preceding one, the uniting of teaching and research, so that teachers can transmit to their disciples not only knowledge already acquired, but also the desire of progressing in knowledge and the methodologies and instruments that permit the effective realization of this desire.

This is not the moment to sketch a history of the institution of the university, nor (a less ambitious objective, but still foreign to the purpose I am aiming at) to show how the existence or lack thereof of cooperation among researchers in different fields (interdisciplinary study, it would be called today) has always marked the periods of progress or decline in the university. St. Josemaría Escrivá, who was a great academic, perceived this clearly and therefore on many occasions promoted dialogue and teamwork that fostered a spirit of service and love for the truth. As he once said, "love for the truth imbues the life and work of the scientist and sustains his rectitude

in possibly difficult situations."² No researcher moved by an authentically scientific interest and, in broader terms, no Christian, can "be afraid of developing human knowledge, because all intellectual effort, if it is serious, is aimed at truth."³

St. Josemaría Escrivá also emphasized the need to unite moral rectitude and love of truth with respect for the autonomy of the sciences, and, therefore for the legitimate freedom of teachers and researchers, in accord with a unified vision of the world and of man that always puts knowledge at the service of the person. His university mentality was thus fused with his condition as a Christian and a priest in a reciprocal strengthening. His writings in this regard are numerous. Here we will cite only one of the most significant texts, taken from an interview that he granted in 1967: "Religion is the greatest rebellion of men who do not want to live as beasts, who are not satisfied and will not rest until they reach and come to know their Creator. Thus, the study of religion is a fundamental need...That is why religion should be present in the universities, where it should be taught at the high, scholarly level of good theology. A university from which religion is absent is an incomplete university; it neglects a fundamental facet of human personality, which does not exclude but rather presupposes the other facets."⁴

2. Address at the University of Navarre on May 9, 1974 (published in *Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y la Universidad*, Pamplona 1983, pp. 106-107.

3. *Christ Is Passing By*, no.10.

4. *Conversations*, no. 73.

b) *Formation*

The words just cited refer, on the one hand, to the subordination of society to the good of the human person and, more specifically, to the good of the human person understood in all its richness, that is, open to God and called to union with him. On the other hand, they refer to the autonomy and specificity of each science, since what we might call the “theological orientation” of the human being and of his various activities does not ignore, but rather presupposes, the existence of other dimensions, certainly less high but equally constitutive of the human person. And in the specific case of the university, this implies seriousness in research, dedication to teaching, and professionalism in all the duties proper to academic life.

Having said this, and therefore having reaffirmed the autonomy of every sphere of science, it would be good to repeat that human society is not made up of machines or of slaves, but of human beings endowed with intellect and freedom. Therefore the institutions that make up society should enjoy a life of their own; they should have certain proper spheres of activity in which they can move with autonomy and which are respected by the rest of society. And at the same time they should be harmoniously integrated into the society, giving rise to a sincere and authentic common life. What is destructive of social life is not only violent submission to a

despotic authority or the negation of all autonomy, but also selfishness, the excessive, egocentric concern for one’s own interests.

St. Josemaría Escrivá had a clear awareness of this. Indeed, in his preaching two realities were always united: freedom and responsibility. Freedom, understood as a divine gift in virtue of which every human being is called to decide about his own life; and responsibility, as a spiritual attitude, as a nobility of spirit by which every human being, man or woman, consciously takes up his vocation, the role which he is called upon to carry out in history before God, and coordinates his activity with that of those around him.

The university, as St. Josemaría pointed out, needs to have “its own life.” It “must have the independence of an organ in a living body. That is, it must have freedom within its specific task of service to the common good,”⁵ since “the university has as its highest mission that of serving mankind and of being a leaven in society.”⁶

In reading his writings, we soon note that this ideal, this union between freedom and responsibility, brings with it two fundamental consequences for the university: the love for the truth that we have already mentioned, with all that stems therefrom, and attention to the student as

5. *Conversations*, no. 79.

6. Address given at the University of Navarre on October 7, 1967 (in *Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y la Universidad*, Pamplona 1983, p. 90).

a person. Scientific rigor, eagerness to advance in human knowledge, the thrill one feels in making new discoveries, all these should never lead one to forget that he is not only a researcher but also a human being, and that at the same time those who listen to him in class, or participate in his research work, are not only disciples but men and women, human persons. His work as a university professor or researcher does not have as its goal just the progress of human knowledge. Also, and inseparably, it should seek to form those who are close to him as persons.

“There is no university in the proper sense,” wrote St. Josemaría, “in schools in which the transmission of knowledge is not united to the integral formation of the students’ personality.”⁷

The university should be an institution that forms men and women by elevating their mind and spirit. This goal is furthered not only through the general tone of the teaching carried out in harmony with the truth and the demands of the times, but also (and I am happy to say this here in the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, where all of this is well looked after) the cordial relationship between professors and students, as well as, although this may seem of secondary importance, the beauty and decoration of the buildings.

c) *Service to evangelization*

“The university does not turn its back on the doubts, the worries, the needs of its students. It is not its mission to offer immediate solutions. But studying problems with scientific depth moves hearts, shakes off passivity, awakens sleeping powers and forms citizens prepared to construct a more just society.”⁸ These words spoken by St. Josemaría in another academic address bring us to the third and final point I would like to develop.

To speak of the university, and in particular of a university which, faithful to its name, promotes not only the growth of knowledge but also the formation of those who attend it, is to speak of the future, of the succeeding generations. More specifically, of the effort thanks to which present generations are preparing the path for the following ones, fostering the progressive development of humanity. This task requires work, dedication, effort. And to give direction to all this effort, one needs an adequate conception of man and his destiny, something to which I have already referred. Societies are always the reflection of the image that human beings have of themselves. Christ, in whom we find the truth about God and about man, is the sure and indispensable guide.

7. Address given at the University of Navarre on November 28, 1964 (in *Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y la Universidad*, p. 77).

8. Address given at the University of Navarre on October 7, 1972 (in *Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y la Universidad*, p. 98).

Pope John Paul II, in the first of his encyclicals, invited us to look to Christ, “the center of the cosmos and of history,” and to turn entirely towards him all of our faculties: intellect, will, heart.⁹ A call, no less pressing, was directed to us many years later, when in *Novo Millennio Ineunte* the Roman Pontiff sketched out the program for the period in history in which we now find ourselves: “*Duc in altum!* Let us go forward in hope! A new millennium is opening before the Church like a vast ocean upon which we shall venture, relying on the help of Christ.”¹⁰

Only a few months ago, when proclaiming the Year of the Eucharist, John Paul II recognized that the good auspices under which the millennium began have become darker and that “a scenario emerged which, despite certain positive elements, is marred by acts of violence and bloodshed which cause continued concern.”¹¹ The Pope, nevertheless, did not retreat or abandon his effort, but rather decisively reaffirmed his hope: “in inviting the Church to celebrate the Jubilee of the two-thousandth anniversary of the Incarnation, I was convinced—and I still am, more than ever!—that this celebration would be of benefit to humanity in the ‘long term.’”¹² “More than ever!” Beyond any doubts and difficulties, the Christian has the assurance of God’s love shown in Christ, and he should live and act in accordance.

In St. Josemaría Escrivá we find this same faith, this same confidence in the power that Christ’s teaching and life can have on history. Among his many statements in this regard, I have chosen one that comes precisely from one of his academic addresses and that has as its background university work: “This world of ours will be saved, not by those who try to drug the life of the spirit, reducing everything to questions of economics or personal welfare, but by those who have faith in God and in the eternal destiny of man and who know how to receive the truth of Christ as a light to guide man’s action and behavior.”¹³ They will act as consistent Christians, and thus serve their fellow citizens, who recognize and receive the faith as the fullness of truth: not only as a light that consoles them in moments of tribulation, but as a spur that leads them to undertake works of service to their fellow men and women.

I have reached the end of my talk. The above considerations and texts are well known to those who make up the academic faculty of the institution in which we find ourselves. For the Università della Santa Croce the adjective “pontifical” is not, nor has it ever been, a merely decorative title. Rather it is a qualification which it considers binding, inviting it to an active fidelity to the

9. John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, nos. 1 & 7.

10. John Paul II, Apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, no. 58.11. John Paul II, Apostolic letter *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, no. 6.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Address at the University of Navarre on May 9, 1974 (published in *Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer*

Roman Pontiff, and, in union with the Roman Pontiff, to the entire Church. This is the spirit which, echoing the priestly and apostolic zeal of St. Josemaría Escrivá, was infused into it by its founder, Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, and which its present Chancellor, Bishop Javier Echevarría, whose friendship I consider an honor, continues to remind us of.

Twenty years have passed since the present Pontifical University of the Holy Cross began its work. This is a brief period of time for an institution, but a time filled with accomplishments, thanks precisely to its faithfulness to its foundational spirit. I end by expressing my wish that future years, lived always with the same intellectual and spiritual bearings, may be as fruitful, if not more so, than those that have already gone by.