

# Rome

April 9, 2008

*At the the granting of honorary doctorates by the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross*

Your eminences and reverend bishops, esteemed civil authorities, professors, students and all the personnel at the university, ladies and gentlemen:

A cordial greeting to all of you who are participating in the granting by our university of its first honorary doctorates in Institutional Communications. A special and affectionate greeting goes out to the new doctors: His Eminence Cardinal Camillo Ruini, Vicar of the Pope for the Diocese of Rome and, for many years, President of the Italian Bishops' Conference; and the illustrious Professor Alfonso Nieto Tamargo, who actively assisted, also as a professor, in the birth and development of the School of Institutional Communications.

In today's ceremony, the merits of the new doctors are intertwined with the academic tradition represented by the biretta, the ring, and the medal, symbols of teaching skill, professional prestige and the bond with our university community. But allow me to go beyond the protocol and reflect with you briefly about the duty incumbent upon a university in the present historical circumstances.

Some words of St. Gregory the Great can help us to consider how ancient and deep is the connection between the Church and communication. This great Pope, who occupied the Chair of Peter between the years 590 and 604, said that "paintings should be placed in the churches so that those unable to read can, by looking at the walls, read what they are not capable of reading in the manuscripts."<sup>1</sup> This brief observation is a good example of how communication in the Church has not been the discovery of our own day and age. In fact, right from the beginning, Christians have daringly sought the most efficacious ways to make the word of God reach, in a way people can understand, the greatest possible number of persons, even those who are physically distant. Thus we can point to a constant link between the history of the Church and the history of communication, understood in a broad sense.

But the Church does not limit herself to "making use" of the means of communication for her mission of evangelization. John Paul II, in a well-known passage of his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, said that it is necessary to do more: we need to integrate the Christian message into the "new culture" created by advances in communication.<sup>2</sup> The Pope added, perhaps to avoid discouragement and false expectations, that this is a complicated question, since this "new culture" results not

1. St. Gregory the Great, Dz 477, PL 77, 1128BC-1129C.

2. Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 37.

just from the content, but also from the new ways of communicating themselves, with a new language, new techniques, and a new psychology.<sup>3</sup> I think that anyone who is working on these questions needs the patient work and interdisciplinary approach that only the university environment can offer.

Therefore, it is clear why the act of investiture that brings us together today is not of interest solely to one field of knowledge, that of communication, but also touches on theology, philosophy and canon law. John Paul II's invitation is today more timely than ever. It is necessary to realize in our epoch a synthesis between the message, the means of communication, and the cultural context that the many generations preceding us have brought into being.

As a popular philosopher of communication wrote: "What happens if we put a drop of red coloring into a test tube full of clear water? Do we obtain clear water plus a drop of red coloring? Obviously not. We have a new coloration of every molecule of the water. A new media does not just add something; it changes everything. In the year 1500, after the invention of the printing press, we did not have old Europe plus the printing press. We had a different Europe."<sup>4</sup>

We can ask ourselves now if this metaphor of coloring could also

apply to the effect that the Christian spirit produces in the waters—at times muddied—of our culture. How can we integrate the Christian message into the "new culture" created by the means of communication. John Paul II himself suggested a way: "We need heralds of the Gospel who are experts in humanity, who know in depth the hearts of the men of today, who participate in their joys and hopes, concerns and sorrows, and at the same time who are persons in love with God. For this, we need new saints."<sup>5</sup>

Along these lines, I would like to highlight something Pope Benedict XVI has recently stressed, that is, the positive meaning of the Christian message. He told a group of German journalists a few months after his election. "Christianity, Catholicism, is not a set of prohibitions, but a positive option. It is very important to help people realize this once again, since today this outlook has almost completely disappeared. We have heard so much talk of what is not permitted that now we need to tell people: the message we are bringing you is a positive one."<sup>6</sup>

St. Josemaría Escrivá, from whose priestly soul and love for the university the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross was born, always had a clear perception of the great human and Christian service that professionals in the field of commu-

3. *Ibid.*

4. Neil Postman, "Defending Ourselves Against the Seductions of Eloquence," in Kenneth Dyson and Walter Homolka, Eds. *Culture First! Promoting Standards in the New Media Age*, Cassel, London, 1996, p. 34.

5. John Paul II, Address to the Symposium of the Council of the European Bishops' Conference, October 11, 1985.

6. Benedict XVI, August 5, 2005.

nications can carry out. In the academic year 1940-1941, at the request of a friend and with the encouragement of the bishop of Madrid, he gave classes in ethics in what later became the official school of journalism. He always insisted that the children of God should be present with their professionalism, their Christian identity, and their love for the truth in the places where public opinion is formed. "It is difficult," this holy priest reminded us, "for people really to live together harmoniously when there is no real information. And real information does not fear the truth and does not allow itself to be led away by motives of intrigue, false prestige or economic advantage."<sup>7</sup>

This entails, in the academic setting, harmonizing the gift of faith with the daily effort to deepen one's knowledge of the communications field. Thus we will help "to make the truth lovable," as our first Chancellor, Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, advised in the title of a book that collected some of his addresses at this university. How much gratitude we owe to this bishop, so exemplary in his service to the Church and to souls! Following his example, let us entrust these resolutions to our Lord and to Holy Mary, Seat of Wisdom.

## Kenya

### April 23, 2008

*Interview in The Standard, on the occasion of the official recognition of the University of Strathmore by the Kenyan Government*

**You lived for many years alongside St. Josemaría Escrivá who was the inspiration of Strathmore. Can you tell us a little about his vision of Strathmore?**

When St. Josemaría Escrivá accepted, back in 1957, the invitation of Archbishop Gastone Mojaisky Perelli, then Apostolic Delegate resident in Mombasa, to start a university in Nairobi, he was really responding to the universal calling that God had given Opus Dei.

The request of Archbishop Gastone Mojaisky came at an historic moment for Africa and for Kenya in particular. Full independence was only five years away, and the country had a multi-ethnic transitional government in place. St. Josemaría was open to founding a university provided that the government gave a guarantee concerning its independence and autonomy. However, it soon became clear that the project of establishing a university level institution had to be modified. It was the founder himself who suggested starting instead with an institute of higher learning and a students' residence.

7. St. Josemaría, *Conversations with Josemaría Escrivá*, no. 86.