



The Holy See

VISIT TO THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF THE SACRED HEART
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 50th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE FACULTY OF MEDICINE AND SURGERY
OF THE AGOSTINO GEMELLI POLYCLINIC

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI

Thursday, 3 May 2012

[[Video](#)]

Dear Cardinals,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Hon. Mr President of the Chamber and Mr Ministers,

Distinguished Pro-Rector,

Distinguished Authorities, Lecturers, Doctors, Distinguished Health-Care and University Staff,

Dear Students and Dear Patients,

I meet you with special joy today to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery of the Agostino Gemelli Polyclinic. I thank the President of the Istituto Toniolo, Cardinal Angelo Scola and the Pro-Rector, Prof. Franco Anelli, for their courteous words. I greet the President of the Chamber, Hon. Mr Gianfranco Fini, the Ministers, Hon. Mr Lorenzo Ornaghi and Hon. Mr Renato Balduzzi, the numerous authorities, as well as the lecturers, doctors, staff and students of the Polyclinic and of the Catholic University. I address a special thought to you, dear patients.

On this occasion I would like to contribute a few thoughts. Our time is one in which the experimental sciences have transformed the vision of the world and even man's understanding of himself. The many discoveries and the rapid succession of innovative technologies are a well founded reason for pride but they are frequently not without disturbing implications. Indeed,

against the background of the widespread optimism in scientific knowledge is being overcast by the shadow of a crisis in thought. Rich in means but less so in their aims, the men and women of our time are often conditioned by reductionism and relativism, which leads to the loss of meaning of things; blinded, as it were, by technical efficiency, they forget the fundamental horizon of the need for meaning, thereby relegating the transcendent dimension to irrelevance. Against this background thought is weakened and an ethical impoverishment which blurs valuable norms of reference gains ground.

What was the fertile root of European culture and progress seems to have been forgotten. In it the search for the Absolute — the *quaerere Deum* — included the need to deepen the knowledge of the profane sciences, the entire world of knowledge (cf. [*Address to the Collège des Bernardins in Paris*](#), 12 September 2008). Scientific research and the question of meaning, even with their specific epistemological and methodological features, in fact flow from one source, the *Logos*, that presides over creative work and guides the sense of history. A fundamentally technological and practical mindset generates a perilous imbalance between what is technologically possible and what is morally sound, with unforeseeable consequences.

Thus it is important for culture to rediscover the vigour of the meaning and dynamism of transcendence, in a word, to present the horizon of the *quaerere Deum* decisively. St Augustine's famous sentence springs to mind: "you have made us for yourself [O Lord] and our heart is restless until it rests in you" (*Confessions*, I, 1).

It may be said that the impulse of scientific research itself stems from the longing for God that dwells in the human heart: basically, scientists, even unconsciously, strive to attain that truth which can give meaning to life. Yet, however enthusiastic and tenacious human research is, it is incapable merely with its own efforts of reaching a safe landing place, for "man is incapable of fully explaining the strange semi-darkness that overshadows the question of the eternal realities.... God must take the initiative of reaching out and speaking to man" (J. Ratzinger, *L'Europa di Benedetto nella crisi delle culture*, Cantagalli, Roma 2005, 124).

To restore reason to its native, integral dimension, one must rediscover the source which scientific research shares with the quest for faith, *fides quaerens intellectum*, according to Anselm's intuition. Science and faith have a fruitful reciprocity, an almost complementary need for understanding the real. Paradoxically, however, the positivist culture itself, excluding the question on God from scientific discussion, determines the decline of thought and the enfeeblement of the ability to understand this reality.

Yet the human quest for *quaerere Deum* would lose itself in a maze if it were not to meet illumination and reliable orientation, which is the way of God himself who, with immense love, makes himself close to man: "In Jesus Christ God not only speaks to man but also seeks him out.... It is a search which begins in the heart of God and culminates in the Incarnation of the

Word” (John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, n. 7).

As the religion of the *Logos*, Christianity does not relegate faith to the sphere of the irrational, but attributes the origin and sense of reality to creative Reason, which, in the crucified God, is expressed as love and invites us to take the way of the *quaerere Deum*: “I am the way, the truth, and the life”. Here St Thomas Aquinas comments: “For the destination of this way is the end of human desire. Now human beings especially desire two things: first, a knowledge of the truth, and this is characteristic of them; secondly, that they continue to exist, and this is common to all things. These two were already applied to Christ... If then, you ask which way to go, accept Christ, for he is the way” (*Esposizioni su Giovanni*, chap. 14, Lecture 2).

The Gospel of life thus illuminates man’s uphill journey and when he faces the temptation of absolute autonomy, reminds him: “man’s life comes from God; it is his gift, his image, his imprint, a sharing in his breath of life” (John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, n. 39). And it is precisely by taking the path of faith that man is enabled to discern in the very realities of suffering and death, which pass through his life, an authentic possibility for the good and for life. In the Cross of Christ he perceives the Tree of Life, a revelation of God’s passionate love for man. The cure of those who are suffering is thus a daily encounter with the Face of Christ, and the dedication of the mind and the heart become a sign of God’s mercy and of his victory over death.

Experienced fully, the search is enlightened by science and faith and from these two “wings” draws dynamism and an impetus, without ever losing its proper humility, the sense of its own limitations. In this way the quest for God becomes fertile for the mind, a leaven of culture, a champion of true humanism, a search that does not stop at the surface.

Dear friends, always let yourselves be guided by the knowledge that comes from on high, by knowledge illuminated by faith, recalling that wisdom demands the passion and effort of seeking.

The indispensable task of the Catholic University fits in here. It is a place in which the educational relationship is placed at the service of the person in the construction of a qualified scientific skill, rooted in a patrimony of the different branches of knowledge which the evolution of generations has distilled into wisdom of life; a place in which the relationship of treatment is not a profession but a mission; where the charity of the Good Samaritan is the first seat of learning and the face of suffering man is Christ’s own Face: “you did it to me” (Mt 25:40).

The Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, in the daily work of research, teaching and study, lives in this *traditio* that expresses its own potential for innovation: no progress, less still at the cultural level, is nourished by mere repetition but demands an ever new beginning. Further, it requires the availability for exchange and dialogue that opens the mind and witnesses to the rich fruitfulness of the patrimony of faith. In this way the personality is endowed with a solid structure, in which the Christian identity penetrates daily life and from within expresses an excellent

professionalism.

Today the Catholic University, which has a special relationship with the See of Peter, is called to be an exemplary institution that does not limit learning to economic question but rather broadens its scope to the ability to plan. In this the gift of intelligence investigates and develops the gifts of the created world, surmounting a utilitarian vision of existence geared solely to production, because “the human being is made for gift, which expresses and makes present his transcendent dimension” (*Caritas in Veritate*, n. 34).

Precisely this combination of scientific research and unconditional service to life outlines the Catholic features of the Agostino Gemelli Faculty of Medicine and Surgery, because the perspective of faith is found within — neither superimposed nor juxtaposed — the keen and tenacious search for knowledge.

A Catholic Faculty of Medicine is a place where transcendent humanism is not a rhetorical slogan but a rule of daily devotion put into practice. Dreaming of an authentically Catholic Faculty of Medicine and Surgery, Fr Gemelli — and many others with him, such as Prof. Brasca — brought back to the centre of attention the human person in his frailty and greatness, in the ever new resources of passionate research and likewise in the awareness of both the limitation and the mystery of life. For this reason you wished to set up a new university centre for life to support other institutions already in existence, such, as for example, the Paul vi International Scientific Institute. I therefore encourage attention to life in all its phases.

I would now like to address in particular all the patients present here at the Gemelli, to assure them of my prayers and affection and to tell them that here they will always be lovingly cared for because the face of the suffering Christ is reflected in their own faces.

It is truly God’s love that shines out in Christ, that renders the researcher’s gaze acute and penetrating and grasps what no investigation can perceive. Bl. Giuseppe Toniolo had this clearly in mind when he asserted that it is in man’s nature to read in others the image of God Love and his imprint on creation. Without love even science loses its nobility. Love alone guarantees the humanity of research. Thank you for your attention.