

**REMARKS OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE  
 APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
 “LAND O’LAKES AT 50: THE FUTURE OF CATHOLIC HIGHER EDUCATION”  
 NOVEMBER 10, 2017  
 THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA, WASHINGTON, DC**

I wish to thank Dr. John Garvey, President of the Catholic University of America, for his kind invitation to be here. I greet His Eminence Sean Cardinal O’Malley, Archbishop of Boston, and all of you distinguished scholars, academic leaders, faculty members and students. As the Apostolic Nuncio, the Holy Father’s representative in this country, I wish to express the spiritual closeness of the Holy Father and all gathered here on this occasion as you explore the future of Catholic Higher Education on the fiftieth anniversary of the Land O’Lakes Statement.

The Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, governing Catholic universities, begins:

Born from the heart of the Church, a Catholic university is located in that course of tradition which may be traced back to the very origin of the University as an institution. It has always been recognized as an incomparable center of creativity and dissemination of knowledge for the good of humanity. (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 1)

Two words from this paragraph strike me: “heart” and “tradition”. *Heart* can be understood in two ways. First, it could mean the love that the Church has toward the world. Second, it could mean the center of the person, just as Luke speaks of the Virgin when he says, “*She held all these things in her heart.*” (LUKE 2:31)

A university is the fruit of a larger educational experience. At the origin of a university is not a decree or a doctrine, but an experience of the encounter with reality in all its breadth and richness, an educational experience of handing on and freely seeking the truth.

Pope Francis has said that we live not so much in “an age of change but a change of age.” Although we live in a period of profound change, marked by crises in society and culture, the fundamental questions of the human person – questions that must be examined by every generation – remain. In the past, the responses to these questions did not speak directly to the heart of society or persons.

Before it can seek to give answers, first, a university must seek to raise the questions that every man or woman holds in his heart. As Pope Francis says, “This is one of the challenges of our time: transmitting knowledge and offering a key for vital comprehension, not a heap of notions unconnected to one another. There is need of a true evangelical hermeneutic for better understanding life, the world, and humanity.” (FRANCIS, ADDRESS TO THE COMMUNITY OF THE PONTIFICAL GREGORIAN UNIVERSITY, 10 APRIL 2014)

What experiences lie at the origin of a Catholic university? The first is the experience of love or the desire for truth – to know that seeking is not useless and that the journey for knowledge leads to the question for everything: the question of the Absolute which illuminates all of reality and our own existence.

A second experience is that human intelligence is able to know reality and penetrate its meaning. A person grows in humanity when he or she moves from phenomenon to principle. The aim of education is to help future generations grow in humanity, trusting in the educational proposal left to them. “To grow in humanity” means to grow in intelligence and goodness, in the capacity for being just and for solidarity, and, principally, in being open to and desiring to live with Him, who is the definitive meaning of life.

When these experiences are realized in community and are communicated to new generations, they give rise to “tradition”. Through the tradition, knowledge is widened and deepened. Eventually the knowledge and experience become a patrimony, transmitted and appropriated for the good of others. This knowledge must be “rediscovered”. New generations are invited to verify the truth of this tradition by reason. To transmit, to receive, to know through rediscovery, and to mature in the love originating in the truth – all these form part of the experience that is at the foundation of a university. It is this experience which is called education.

In Catholic education, teaching is not enough; formation is necessary. To form another is to help the person to be a better person: a free, conscious and responsible conscious subject, open to the good, the true and beautiful and capable of engaging in deep relationships with others. Pope Benedict XVI said: “Education is not and must never be considered something purely utilitarian. It is about forming the human person, equipping him or her to live life to the full – in short it is about imparting wisdom.” (BENEDICT XVI, ADDRESS TO TEACHERS AND RELIGIOUS, ST. MARY’S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, TWICKENHAM, 17 SEPTEMBER 2010)

The Catholic university exists as a place where a person can be formed, coming to knowledge of the truth using both faith *and* reason. The Catholic university is born from the idea of joining a wise, ordered vision of knowledge with a discipline like theology, bringing about a unity in diversity. This is the soul of a university, its proper seal, distinguishing it from other institutions of higher learning.

Today, the Church finds herself in a cultural context in which ideologies seek to restrict faith to private life. Christianity struggles to find space to make its cultural proposal, which frequently becomes a source of polarization and confrontation. Pope Francis guides us in this respect:

Conflict cannot be ignored or concealed. It has to be faced. But if we remain trapped in conflict, we lose our perspective, our horizons shrink and reality itself begins to fall apart. In the midst of conflict, we lose our sense of the profound unity of reality. (FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 226)

When faith works in accordance with its nature in the conscience and hearts of men and women, it becomes a light allowing a person to judge reality in a distinct manner. Our world is marked by ideologies. Whether it is fundamentalism or a dictatorship of relativism, a virus can invade even a Catholic university and threaten freedom. The Catholic vision of the university and the person resists these ideologies. Every person deserves to have his dignity and the rights of conscience respected, even those who do not think the same way. Each person has a right to seek the truth in freedom, and in finding it to discover the beautiful and the good.

As you look to the future of Catholic Higher Education, I conclude by looking back to the words of Pope Benedict XVI when he visited this university:

Catholic identity is not dependent upon statistics. Neither can it be equated with orthodoxy of course-content. It demands and inspires much more, namely that each and every aspect of your learning communities reverberates with the ecclesial life of faith. Only in faith can truth become incarnate and reason truly human, capable of directing the will along the path of freedom. In this way, our institutions make a vital contribution to the mission of the Church, and truly serve society. They become places in which God’s active presence in human affairs is recognized and in which every young person discovers the joy of entering into Christ’s “being for others.” (BENEDICT XVI, ADDRESS TO CATHOLIC EDUCATORS, 17 APRIL 2008)

Thank you.