

Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis

*To the Reverend Michal Paluch, O.P.
Rector of the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas*

On the centenary of the birth of Saint John Paul II, the most illustrious alumnus of your university, the Institute of Culture named after him is being inaugurated at the Angelicum, within the Faculty of Philosophy. In expressing my appreciation for this initiative, I cordially greet the entire academic community and all those present for the event, especially the representatives of the two Polish Foundations, *Futura Iuventa* and *Saint Nicholas*, which support the new Institute.

The principal aim of the Institute is to reflect on contemporary culture. To do so, the organizers intend to seek the collaboration of eminent philosophers, theologians and men and women of culture in its broadest sense. Saint John Paul II is at once both the inspiration behind this project and its first and most important architect. This is thanks to the rich and multifaceted heritage that he left to us, and even more so by the example of his open and contemplative spirit, his passion for God and man, for creation, history and art.

The range of experiences that marked his life, especially the momentous historical events and the personal sufferings that he sought to interpret in the light of the Spirit, led Saint John Paul II to an even deeper reflection on man and his cultural roots as an essential reference point for every proclamation of the Gospel. Indeed, in his first Encyclical he wrote: “We approach all cultures, all ideological concepts, all people of good will. We approach them with the esteem, respect and discernment that since the time of the Apostles has marked the missionary attitude, the attitude of the missionary. Suffice it to mention Saint Paul and, for instance, his address in the Areopagus at Athens. The missionary attitude always begins with a feeling of deep esteem for ‘what is in man’, for what man has himself worked out in the depths of his spirit concerning the most profound and important problems. It is a question of respecting everything that has been brought about in him by the Spirit, which ‘blows where it wills’” (*Redemptor Hominis*, 12; cf. *Address to UNESCO*, 2 June 1980).

We need to keep this approach alive if we wish to be an outward-looking Church, not satisfied with preserving and administering what already exists but seeking to be faithful to our mission.

I am pleased that this initiative has found a home in the University of Saint Thomas Aquinas. The Angelicum in fact houses an academic community comprising professors and students from throughout the world and is a fitting place for interpreting the important challenges of today’s cultures. The tradition of the Dominican Order, with the important role given to rational reflection on faith and its content, articulated in a magisterial way by the Angelic Doctor, will certainly favour this project, so that it will be characterized by the courage of the truth, freedom of spirit and intellectual honesty (cf. SAINT PAUL VI, Apostolic Letter *Lumen Ecclesiae*, 20 November 1974, 8; SAINT JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*, 43).

With these sentiments, I renew my encouragement and gratitude to you, dear brother, and to all those who have established the new Institute. To the professors, students and staff I send my best wishes for their work, and to all I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 18 May 2020