

Opening address for the Inauguration of the St John Paul II Institute of Culture

Fr. Michał Paluch OP, Rector Magnificus, Angelicum

Eminences,

Excellencies,

Reverend Fathers and Sisters,

Professors and Students of the Angelicum,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas, the Angelicum, in Rome!

It is with great emotion that I greet you at the beginning of our event on the 100th anniversary of the birth of Karol Wojtyła: the opening ceremony of the Saint John Paul II Institute of Culture. Karol Wojtyła is the most famous and the most outstanding student of the Angelicum. To open a new institution under his patronage, is an honour and a great source of joy for our university. But for a Rector who happens to be Polish and who may be considered to belong to the “JPII generation”, there is an additional deep wellspring of joy...

Thanks to the online connection, we will be celebrating today together with the representatives of the Polish Foundations: Saint Nicholas and Futura Iuventa and its strategic benefactors, with the Provincial of the Polish Dominican Province, all of whom are joining us from Warsaw; Professor Rémi Bague, who will present his opening conference from Paris.

Let me introduce you briefly to where we are.

The Angelicum is a Dominican institution. The origins of our University go back to the medieval Dominican House of Study in Rome, founded in the 13th century, where Thomas Aquinas taught. Today the Angelicum, one of the seven pontifical universities in Rome, has about a thousand students of 97 different nationalities coming from all the continents in the world (well, except for Antarctica). Among our alumni we have about 140 bishops, archbishops and cardinals living in the different parts of the world.

Karol Wojtyła prepared his doctoral dissertation while studying at the Angelicum from 1946 to 1948 (actually, he must have had classes in the space in which we are celebrating today). As John Paul II, he came to the Angelicum twice (by the way, before those visits, he kept coming back quite regularly as bishop and cardinal to see his professors, especially Fr Feliks Bednarski). During these visits in 1979 and 1997, he delivered very substantial discourses to the academic community.

Before we start to enjoy the presence among us of our distinguished guests, let me mention another anniversary. In a couple of weeks, on 2nd June, we will have the 40th anniversary of the famous address presented by John Paul II in the headquarters of UNESCO in Paris. John Paul II was the first Roman pontiff to address this noble organization. Let me recall only one phrase from this

extremely rich and important discourse, the phrase repeated at the beginning and at the end of this talk, the crucial phrase that gives to this address its tone and unity: *genus humanum arte et ratione vivit* - *Man lives a really human life thanks to culture*. Do I need to add that our most illustrious alumnus found this phrase in the work of the *Doctor Angelicus*? In fact, one can see through his whole pontificate a very consistent drive for a Thomistic understanding of the relationship between reason and faith, a deep conviction of the crucial role of philosophy in creating a possibility for dialogue with contemporary culture, and a stress on the critical role of anthropological discussion. The Institute of Culture, set up at the Faculty of Philosophy of our University, has an obvious and important place in this Thomistic and Wojtylian programme.

Let's all be thankful to God today for the life and work of Karol Wojtyła, John Paul II. And let's be thankful that this gratitude may take so concrete and palpable a form today. First of all, I want to thank all those who have made the project of the new institute a reality (as we know, the Dominicans have sometimes a problem with taking the step from potency to act). I think with great gratitude of Dariusz Karłowicz, Joanna Paciorek and Mateusz Bednarkiewicz from the Foundations Saint Nicholas and Futura Iuventa. Your courageous ideas and efficient commitment to this project inspired us and released the energy needed to bring it to life. I want to greet in a special way, Mrs Jolanta and Mr Mirosław Gruszka, Mr Krzysztof Domarecki and Mr Wojciech Piasecki – the strategic sponsors of this enterprise. Without your generosity, we would not be celebrating today. But I also want to mention the help of my brothers in the Order. This project would not have been possible without the openness and cooperation of Fr Serge-Thomas Bonino, the dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, and Fr Paweł Kozacki, the Provincial of the Polish Province. I am very thankful as well to Fr Ryszard Rybka for having accepted to be the first director of the Institute.

Now, it is high time for the most important message of the evening. As many of you know, we have received a message from Pope Francis for this opening celebration. May I invite Archbishop Jan Romeo Pawłowski, the head of the third section in the Secretary of State, who accepted to be the special envoy of His Holiness, to come forward and to present the letter of the Pope to us.