

Address for the Inauguration of the St John Paul II Institute of Culture

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It is really a great honor for our Faculty of Philosophy to welcome St John Paul II Institute of Culture. But why this link of the new Institute with a faculty of philosophy? And, moreover, with *this* faculty of philosophy?

Saint John Paul II himself responds to the first question, when in his Encyclical *Fides et Ratio* – a true charter of Christian culture – he invites philosophy not to limit itself to parochial problems but to revive its proper dimension as wisdom. Philosophy is not a closed discipline ; it is a true wisdom and as such it keeps vital relationships with all other aspects of human culture (literature, sciences, religion...) : it allows itself to be challenged by them, while seeking to enlighten them.

The second question is: why *this* faculty of philosophy? There is a first answer purely factual, contingent (and therefore little philosophical): John Paul II attended our University. There is a second, deeper, answer: I mean the Thomistic specificity of our faculty. Founded in 1882 in the wake of the great encyclical *Aeterni patris* on Christian philosophy, where pope Leo XIII proposed Aquinas as a model, and entrusted to the Order of Preachers, which retains Thomism as an essential element of its intellectual and spiritual tradition, our faculty, for the service of the Church's mission, intended to implement a *living Thomism*. What does it mean? Thomism is Aquinas' doctrine reconstructed through a rigorous historical study. But this doctrine is not a museum piece. Despite its limitations, St. Thomas reached some fundamental principles in the metaphysical and moral order so that his doctrine is able, by their very universality, to assimilate and enlighten the new truths emerging as the historical development of cultures unfolds. This is Thomism as intended by John Paul II. On the one hand, he wanted to enrich "historical" Thomism with the contributions of phenomenology and especially of personalism, and, on the other hand, he calls for the passage from the phenomenon to the foundation, to the philosophy of being.

“We face a great challenge, did he say in *Fides et ratio* (n° 83), [...] to move from *phenomenon to foundation*, a step as necessary as it is urgent. We cannot stop short at experience alone; even if experience does reveal the human being's interiority and spirituality, speculative thinking must penetrate to the spiritual core and the ground from which it rises”.

Hence the recommendation he addressed on 17 November 1979 to the students of our University:

“The philosophy of St. Thomas deserves to be attentively studied and accepted with convictions by the youth of our day by reason of its spirit of openness and of universalism. [...] The basis and source of this openness lie in the fact that the philosophy of St. Thomas is a philosophy of being, that is, of the *actus essendi* whose transcendental value paves the most direct way to rise to the knowledge of subsisting Being and pure Act, namely to God. [...] It is from this proclamation of being that the philosophy of St. Thomas derives its ability to grasp and to “affirm” all that shows itself to the human intellect [...] as a determinate existing being in all the inexhaustible richness of its content.”

Our Faculty is proud of following this exhortation and that is why it welcomes this promising collaboration with St. John Paul II Institute for Culture.