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DEDICATION ADDRESS FOR THE CATHOLIC CENTER AT NYU
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Your Eminence, Chancellor Heald, Chancellor Madden, members of the Faculty,

It is a great privilege for me to have been invited to deliver a brief address at the dedication of the Catholic Center at New York University, and I deeply appreciate the honor which is thus bestowed on me, as a philosopher who has long loved the people and culture of this country.

The foundation of this center has, in my opinion, a great and happy significance. For it is dedicated to the life of intelligence, busy with all the problems and discoveries of modern times, and to an effort to penetrate and quicken the very life of intelligence, and the workings of the mind, with the light of Christian verities grasped in their integrity.

We realize this better if we think of the crucial difficulty with which modern intelligence is confronted, especially in the field of education, and which derives both from the splendid progress and immense achievements of the sciences and from the growing specialization entailed thereby. There is an imperative need for *integration*, meaning at the same time a need to have the various domains of knowledge and searching efforts of the intellect organically unified, and a need to have our mastery over nature, which is ensured by science, serve and foster – and not destroy – that mastery over ourselves, that pursuit of the true ends of human life which is ensured by wisdom.

This need for intellectual integration and for a reconciliation between science and wisdom is now recognized everywhere. That is why – and this is indeed a sign of vitality and ceaseless effort of self-creation characteristic of this country – great American educators and great American universities are more and more concerned with a new development of the humanities, and not only with general education, but also with *fundamental* education. For, necessary as general education may be, giving the student an idea of the variegated richness of human culture, it is insufficient to avoid the dispersion with which we are threatened, and to go beyond a mere encyclopedic training, if it does not rest on the bedrock of basic principles, grasped in their articulate inter-relation, which enable the mind to perceive the meaning, internal order and consistency of our whole heritage of civilization.

I would say that in this regard Catholics have a special opportunity, and a special duty, to serve the common good of the intellect. For they are heirs of an age-old and age-tested intellectual discipline, and assured of an organic system of principles, long since elaborated, which is up to them to extend to all the horizons of the modern mind. They know, in particular, that the universe of the intellect, in its immense and immensely diversified scope, is illuminated and held in vital order by the three kinds of wisdom mentioned by Thomas Aquinas: the merely rational wisdom of metaphysical knowledge; the wisdom, both rational and rooted in faith, of theological knowledge; and the supra-rational wisdom of that knowledge which is spiritual experience provided by love.

Integration in man's intellectual powers does not depend on a merely organizational arrangement or a merely constructive effort. It depends mainly on a vital and vitalizing *attraction* exercised by the higher spheres of knowledge.

The movement towards perfect integration supposes a kind of desire or thirst naturally developed at each degree of human knowledge for a superior approach to reality and a deeper power of penetrating reality; it supposes a dynamic attraction of the universe of the intellect by the three wisdoms to which I just alluded.

The part played by metaphysical wisdom is essential, by the very fact that metaphysics deals with the basic insights of reason with *what things are in themselves*, and sets free, in us, more fully than any other discipline, the sense of being and the sense of truth. In particular, only a serious and extended study in the theory of knowledge may afford that recognition of the proper value and proper limits of science and philosophy and of their mutual connection which is badly needed today.

But those who believe that Subsisting Truth, inaccessible to our natural forces in its own mystery, has made itself known to men in the supra-rational light of faith, are aware that metaphysical wisdom is not enough. Theological wisdom is necessary. It is only through theological knowledge, gazing at the horizon where the word of God expresses itself in our concepts while keeping its divine transcendence, and where our nature, appealing to divine grace, is perfected by it, that we are introduced into the very center of intellectual unity.

And finally those who believe in divine revelation feel that it is not enough to be intellectually enlightened by theological knowledge. They feel the labor of their intellect needs to be refreshed and purified by that knowledge through which union is described as a spiritual experience born in the love of charity, – the third kind of wisdom mentioned by Thomas Aquinas. I have always thought of Thomas Aquinas as the apostle of modern times, because he is the great doctor of the sanctification of intelligence. He does not demand of us that we reach the end of a road which is infinite, but he demands that we enter upon this road. Feebly and slowly as we may advance, the last degree of participation in such wisdom produces a sort of integration and freedom of which no purely intellectual achievement is capable, and which has a power to diffuse the unity proper to love in all the activities of the soul.

My point is that we are confronted now by energies of error – to use St. Paul's expression – which for the sake of a materialistic ideal claiming to transform man and the world, offer themselves to men with the triple power not only of a complete philosophy of life, but also of a faith and a theology (turned against God) and of a mystical self-devotion. Our struggle against these energies of error can be victorious only if we confront them with the integrity of the intellectual and spiritual power embodied in our Christian heritage.

It is an urgent need of the world today that Christians firmly attached to their faith and anxious to give testimony to it dedicate themselves not only to social and religious action in its various forms, but also and first of all to the labor of intelligence in all fields of science and human knowledge, – from mathematics, physics, chemistry or biology to anthropology, sociology, and philosophy, – so as to take part with the required competence in the collective effort of discovery and improvement on which modern man is intent.

Such and intellectual task undertaken in the spirit of faith demands of course a high degree of specialization. This very fact makes it all the more necessary for the representatives of Christian intelligence to tend at the same time to the high degree of integration at which the total power of Christian wisdom is at play. Then they will realize that the keys provided to us by traditional disciplines are intended to open doors, not to close them; and that the weapons of a consistent doctrine rooted in eternal principles are precisely the most appropriate to do creative work, to confront and solve the constantly new problems of the time, and, while taking a firm stand against any erroneous ideology, to understand in intellectual justice and charity the contribution made to our knowledge of truth, even by schools of thought more or less warped by error.

In working in this direction, and endeavoring to acquire such a formation of the mind, the students who participate in the activity of the Catholic Center will develop a deeper sense of cooperation and mutual understanding with their fellow students, and they will prepare themselves to act, later on, on their fellow-men and on contemporary culture in a manner really profitable for the common good of civilization. But this action will be all the more efficacious as it super-abounds from an inner source quickened by wisdom and love.

Colleges and universities, either secular or denominational, are concerned with higher learning, with the essential task of teaching youth *how to think* and of equipping as perfectly as possible their intellectual powers. Even when they realize, as Dr. Harry Gideonse, President of Brooklyn College, stated in a recent address, that “political education on a free society must be moral education, or, in more controversial language, religious education”, I do not think that today they can possibly take

upon themselves the work of final integration we have just considered, and which deals in the last analysis with spirituality as well as with wisdom. This work, in my opinion, is to be performed by special centers which are part of the life of the university but arise from free initiative, and group free participants who have a personal desire to improve their personal knowledge and spiritual experience. I should like in this connection to pay a special homage to the authorities of New York University for the example of generous clear-sightedness they are giving in supporting such an initiative. I am convinced of the outstanding importance of centers like the Catholic Center at New York University, and I am happy to convey today to this Center and to its founders my heartfelt wishes for durable and fecund activity.