

WELCOME ADDRESS OF ARCHBISHOP DRAŽEN KUTLEŠA OF ZAGREB
GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE EUROPEAN FEDERATION OF CATHOLIC UNIVERSITIES (FUCE)
Catholic University of Croatia, Aula Magna, 20 May 2026

Distinguished and honoured guests,

I extend to all of you my cordial greetings, observing the order of precedence and the marks of honour by which you have already been addressed.

In a particular way, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to His Eminence Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça, Prefect of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, for his visit to Zagreb and for the honour he has bestowed upon us by his presence. I also wish to thank our host, the Catholic University of Croatia, its Rector, his collaborators and associates, and the entire academic community for the care, dedication, and effort invested in the preparation of this gathering.

It is a joy that we are meeting here in Zagreb, a city shaped by the encounter of different cultural and spiritual traditions, in order to reflect together on the mission of Catholic universities in Europe today.

The theme of this General Assembly, “Inspiring Catholic Universities in Challenging Times”, touches the very heart of our common mission. This is especially true in Europe, the continent on which the university itself was born from the encounter between Christian faith, classical reason, and the desire for an integral understanding of truth. The challenges facing European culture today are therefore not merely social, political, or institutional. At their deepest level, they are anthropological and spiritual. In such a context, Catholic universities are called to offer not only analysis, but also orientation; not only competence, but wisdom.

It seems fitting, on this occasion, to recall that even the development of modern science invites us to a certain humility before reality. I am thinking here, in particular, of the questions raised by contemporary physics, including quantum physics. Without confusing the methods of science with the language of theology, we may nevertheless observe that the scientific study of the world has not led simply to a flat, closed, and reductionist image of reality. On the contrary, it has opened new questions concerning relation, possibility, intelligibility, and the limits of human description.

In quantum physics, measurement is not merely a neutral recording of an already existing state; rather, it involves an interaction that is relevant to the description of the observed system. This, of course, does not mean that science and faith belong to the same order of knowledge, but it does suggest that serious inquiry into reality does not necessarily lead to a closure before mystery. On the contrary, it can deepen intellectual humility and open the human person to transcendence and to the mystery of creation.

Such humility corresponds to a truth which the Church has always safeguarded: reality is deeper than what we can measure, and reason is broader than what can be reduced to technical calculation. If the world is intelligible, it is not because it is chaos, but because it bears the imprint of the Logos. “*In the beginning was the Word*” (Jn 1:1). This Logos is not an abstract principle, but personal Truth. In Him, reason and meaning, faith and inquiry, creation and vocation, find their deepest unity.

Here we begin to perceive the particular inspiration that Catholic universities can offer today. Their task is to investigate the whole of reality, with full respect for the methodological demands of the sciences, while remaining open to transcendence, so that the unity of truth and the harmony between faith and reason may be made manifest (cf. Second Vatican Council, *Gravissimum educationis*, 10; Saint John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, 1, 4, 15–20).

In an age marked by the fragmentation of knowledge, Catholic universities are called to bear witness to the unity of truth. The created world is permeated by divine wisdom, and all creation bears the imprint of the Creator. If the question of God is excluded in advance from

rational reflection on reality, reason is not enlarged, but diminished. It loses not only a possible answer, but also the courage to ask its deepest questions.

“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Jn 8:32). These words of Christ should stand at the beginning of every authentic education. If Catholic universities cease to take seriously the reality of God and His presence in the world, they place their own identity at risk. If, however, they receive this truth as the horizon of every intellectual and creative endeavour, they will have something necessary and life-giving to offer the world.

We know that science, like every human achievement, can be tempted by self-sufficiency. Yet the true greatness of science is not self-sufficiency, but intellectual humility. In such humility, reason is not weakened; it becomes greater. It acknowledges that it is not the master of truth, but its seeker and servant.

Distinguished participants, our time needs not only new technologies, but a renewed courage: the courage to ask fundamental questions once again; the courage not to separate knowledge from meaning; the courage not to adapt truth to ourselves, but to open ourselves to truth.

For this reason, the mission of the European Federation of Catholic Universities is especially valuable. It is not merely an institutional network of Catholic universities. It is a communion of intellectual and spiritual responsibility for the future of Europe. For where the minds and hearts of the young are formed, the face of our continent is also shaped. If Europe is searching for renewed hope, Catholic universities cannot remain mere observers of cultural processes. They must be places where persons are formed who are capable of thinking truthfully, acting responsibly, and living with hope.

Therefore, I invite you: be courageous in truth, faithful to your mission, and a light in a time of uncertainty. The future of Europe will not be decided only in laboratories, political institutions, or economic strategies. It will also be shaped in classrooms, libraries, and academic communities where the young are taught not only how to think, but why to think and what is worth living for.

Europe does not need only more knowledge. It needs wisdom. It does not need only more information. It needs meaning. It does not need only technical progress. It needs truth.

And truth is not merely an idea. Truth has a face. That face is Jesus Christ.

Thank you for your kind attention.