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Glendon's address at Navarre

During a ceremony in which she was given an honorary doctorate by the University of Navarre, a Spanish university inspired by St. Josemaría, Mary Ann Glendon spoke on the importance of education in the task of transforming culture. Her address follows.

01/30/2003

It is with heartfelt gratitude that I accept the honor you have bestowed upon me in connection with the

celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the University of Navarre. To be welcomed into your community of scholars at such an historic moment, and in such distinguished company, is a great privilege indeed.

As my small contribution to this celebration, I would like to offer a few words of tribute to the vision that has made this University a sign of hope for Catholic academics everywhere. In a world where relativism, historicism, and nihilism threaten the quest for knowledge as never before, Navarre stands as proof of the dynamism and durability of the fearless pursuit of truth that characterizes the Catholic intellectual tradition.

Navarre also bears witness to the wonders that can be accomplished by a vibrant, well-formed laity. Over the fifty years since the doors of this

University were opened, the Church has exhorted lay people, with increasing urgency, to take the lead in what the Holy Father calls the New Evangelization. That task, we are told, involves nothing less than the transformation of culture. Daunting as that sounds, it is not impossible, for, as the Holy Father puts it: “If you are what you should be –that is if you live Christianity without compromise– you will set the world ablaze!”

But here is the problem that must engage those of us who are teachers and scholars: How can one live one’s faith without compromise, if one does not know one’s faith? I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that we Catholics are presently in the midst of a formation crisis, involving formation of our theologians, formation of our religious educators, and thus formation of parents. It is a crisis that leaves parents poorly

equipped to contend with powerful competitors for the souls of the next generation –the aggressively secular government schools and an entertainment industry that delights in debasing everything Catholic. This crisis represents a special danger in modern societies because if religious education does not come up to the general level of secular education, we run into trouble defending our beliefs –even to ourselves.

Given our Church's long and distinguished intellectual tradition, it is tragic that so many Catholics today feel unable to respond even to simplistic relativist, historicist and nihilist attacks. It is a scandal that so many Catholics fall silent when confronted with anti-Catholicism. After all, it is supposed to be one of the glories of our faith that we can give reasons for the moral positions we hold –reasons that are accessible to all men and women of good will,

of other faiths or of no faith. As Pope John Paul II has written, “For Christian witness to be effective, especially in ... delicate and controversial areas, it is important that special effort be made to explain properly the reasons for the Church’s position, stressing that this is not a case of imposing on non-believers a vision based on faith, but of interpreting and defending the values rooted in the very nature of the human person.”

The point I wish to make is that Catholic educators and intellectuals urgently need to resume stewardship of the great intellectual tradition that is our birthright. We need to do so not only for the sake of our own baptismal vocations, and not only for the sake of the Church, but also for the good of our societies. As a member of the United States’ Bio-Ethics Council, I have participated over the past several months in inter-

disciplinary discussions of cloning, stem-cell research and genetic engineering. In the course of these discussions, I have seen not only how important it is for theologians and philosophers to keep up with advances in natural science, but also how much the natural sciences need the human sciences. The fact is that natural science cannot itself generate the wisdom it needs in order to progress without doing harm.

For all these reasons, I join with you today in celebrating fifty years of a vigorous intellectual apostolate at the University of Navarre. Truly, you have helped to keep the lamp of learning alight at a time when many intellectuals have been wandering in darkness. I pray that your beacon will shine ever more brightly, and that you will send forth into the world ever more generations of courageous, unapologetic, and well-formed Catholics.

Finally, I thank you for bearing with my poor efforts to use your beautiful language [*Ed. Note: the address was delivered in Spanish*]. I hope that I have been able to convey my sincere gratitude for this honor, and for all that Navarre's sons and daughters have done to advance the civilization of life and love.

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