

Your Excellencies, Magnificences, Spectabilities, Honorabilities.

Distinguished guests.

Dear friends from Catholic Universities Partnership (CUP).

All who are present today at this academic ceremony.

Ladies and gentlemen.

They say nothing happens by itself. Every house has its mason, every apple tree was planted by someone, behind every great work are the thoughts and efforts of particular people.

Today, when we are gathered here in the circle of Catholic universities from Central and Eastern Europe, it is therefore an honor for me to pay tribute, and at least briefly introduce the life and work of a man, thanks to whom our universities acquired a new dimension in the field of international activities, and thanks to whom our Catholic Universities Partnership exists.

This man is Robert Nanovic - a true gentleman, founding benefactor and advisory board member of the Nanovic Institute for European Studies at the University of Notre Dame, and from today also *Doctor honoris causa* of the Catholic University in Ružomberok.

Robert Nanovic (or *Róbert Ňaňovič* to use the original family name) was born in 1932. It was approximately twenty years after his parents, Nicholas and Madeline, moved from the southwestern part of Slovakia to Pennsylvania. Robert graduated from the University of Notre Dame in 1954 and subsequently, in 1960, he received an MBA (Master of Business Administration) degree at Lehigh University.

After completing his university studies, he served for a while as an officer with the U. S. Army in Germany, but soon returned to the U. S., where he worked in various managerial positions in industrial companies such as the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company, the Freeport Sulphur Company and the General Tire and Rubber Company. In 1972, together with Frank Wilkens, he founded his own investment company *Wilkens and Nanovic Associates*, through which he started implementing several of his philanthropic activities, especially in the field of education and culture.

Over the years, Bob Nanovic (as Robert Nanovic is better known) became a member of the Advisory Council at the College of Arts and Letters at the University of Notre Dame, a board member of the Portland Museum and the Portland Symphony Orchestra, and a member of the executive committee at the Cheverus High School, which is a Jesuits Catholic college.

Currently Bob Nanovic lives in the USA and, together with his wife Elizabeth, has three children (Rebekah, Roberta and Kathryn), as well as several grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

But what was the path taken by Bob and his wife to support Catholic education, and what role did the Catholic University in Ružomberok play in it?

Looking for the answers to these questions, we can reflect on the introductory saying that talks about the importance of our predecessors, and especially of our parents and those to whom we owe an example of perseverance, sacrifice and generosity. For Bob, his father Nicholas was definitely such a person. Nicholas, as a teenager (after Bob's grandfather Jozef died suddenly) supported his three younger brothers in their studies. And how did he support

them? By supporting their studies at the University of Notre Dame. It is therefore not surprising that in 1983 Bob Nanovic started providing scholarships to needy and deserving students of this university, naming the scholarship after his father - the Nicholas S. Nanovic scholarship.

However, that was only the beginning of Bob's philanthropic activities. As he himself recalls, "we (Bob and Elizabeth Nanovic) were thinking for some time about what we could do for Notre Dame." The key moment came in 1987 when Bob and Elizabeth took part in a cruise on the Danube River. It was a tour that included daily lectures by Robert Wegs, a professor of history at the University of Notre Dame. In this atmosphere of stimulating lectures and discussions, their decision was made to support the establishment of a new place at the University of Notre Dame dedicated to European studies. The Nanovics were convinced that European history, culture, traditions, literature and art could significantly enrich students and teachers at the University of Notre Dame. Therefore in 1993 the Center for European Studies was established, which soon became known as the Nanovic Institute for European Studies.

So when did Slovakia become more prominent in this story?

It is understandable that Bob Nanovic, who was always proud of his Slovak roots, had a strong desire to visit the surroundings of Bratislava and Trnava to find his parents' birthplace. However, such an event was difficult to accomplish at a time when Slovakia was behind the so-called Iron Curtain. A suitable opportunity finally came in 2005, when our then vice-rector Dalibor Mikuláš, as well as the then vice-dean of our Faculty of Arts and Letters Marian Kuna, attended a symposium of Catholic universities at the University of Notre Dame, and subsequently another symposium in Ostrihom, Hungary. Bob Nanovic also participated in this symposium, which was actually the first CUP meeting held in Europe. The theme of that meeting was *The Position and Challenge of the Central-Eastern European Catholic Universities*. On the way from this symposium in Hungary to visit Lublin in Poland, (where the CUP symposium/meeting was held a year later), Bob Nanovic stopped off in Slovakia. He did not find his parents' house standing, but what he did find was a young, developing Catholic University in Ružomberok full of warm people. The rector at the time, Boris Banáry, offered him a traditional Slovak slivovitz and as a gift he received a Slovak wooden *valaška* (a traditional Slovak shephook with the head of ax).

And fortunately, it wasn't the last time that Bob Nanovic visited Ružomberok. On the contrary, Bob Nanovic happily returned to our town repeatedly, while the cooperation between our catholic university and his institute deepened more and more. Two years later, in 2007, the CUP meeting took place here in Ružomberok, titled *Challenges to the Catholic University in the Present Times*. Bob Nanovic didn't miss that event. Today, when the CUP meeting is being held in Ružomberok again after 16 years, he unfortunately cannot be present. However, we can still give thanks for the wonderful and multifaceted academic support we received through the Nanovic Institute.

Specifically, there have been more than twenty research stays at the University of Notre Dame, thanks to which our students could successfully complete their dissertations, or our teachers could carry out their research activities. Fourteen senior employees of our university participated in the summer leadership seminar, and dozens more of our employees and

students participated in projects, summer schools, and other international activities. Indeed, cooperation with the Nanovic Institute for European Studies has had a direct or indirect impact on hundreds of students, and that's not to mention the similar support of other CUP universities – the Pázmány Peter Catholic University in Budapest, the John Paul II Catholic University in Lublin, and the Ukrainian Catholic University, which together with the Catholic University in Ružomberok are among the founding universities, as well as the Catholic University of Croatia, and the Sulikhan-Saba Orbeliani University in Georgia, which joined later. Students and teachers from all these (and partially other) universities have been drawing on the generosity of the Nanovic family and the professional academic approach offered by their institute for almost twenty years.

Of course, if it was only about the academic dimension, it would not be enough. A descendant of Slovak Catholics, Bob Nanovic was always convinced of the need for the Christian faith for the integral development of the human personality. Faith, which manifests itself in deeds of love for God and for one's neighbor. If I can help myself with the words that James McAdams, the long-time director of the Nanovic Institute (and let me say also the father of our CUP) told me recently: Catholic Universities Partnership is not only an academic community. Catholic Universities Partnership was from its beginning based on personal relationships, from which mutual friendships arose. Friendships that were renewed during a joint discussion, a good dinner, but also during the joint celebration of the Eucharist. Catholic Universities Partnership is a unique thing that needs to be protected, and for which we need to give thanks.

Dear Mr. Nanovic (or Dear Bob if I may).

I believe that these words will reach you, and that you will forgive me if some historical data did not sound completely accurate. At the same time, I hope that what did sound exact were my words of thanks. With them, I wanted to pay tribute not only to you, but also to a whole generation of persistent, honest and kind-hearted people, among whom you and your wife Elizabeth certainly belong.

As I mentioned at the beginning, nothing happens by itself. And if it weren't for the willingness, effort and finances that you invested in the Institute for European Studies, hundreds of students today probably wouldn't know about the great cultural and spiritual wealth of European Christian civilization. And what is also important, here in Central and Eastern Europe we would not have the wonderful gift of the Catholic Universities Partnership.

For this, may the Lord reward you with his grace and may the Sevenfold Virgin Mary, the patroness of Slovakia, pray for you.

Our really warm thanks, new *Doctor honoris causa* of the Catholic University in Ružomberok!

Samuel Štefan Mahút
Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Letters, Catholic University in Ružomberok