



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE COMMUNITIES OF THE PONTIFICAL UNIVERSITIES
AND ATHENAEUMS OF ROME
FOR THE SOLEMN INAUGURATION OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR**

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Thursday, 19 November 2009*

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Distinguished Rectors, Academic Authorities and Professors,
Dear Students, Brothers and Sisters,*

I welcome you with joy and thank you for gathering *ad Petri Sedem*, to be strengthened in your important and demanding task of teaching, study and research at the service of the Church and of society as a whole. I cordially thank Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski for his words to me introducing this meeting at which we are commemorating two special occasions: the 30th anniversary of the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana*, promulgated on 15 April 1979 by the Servant of God John Paul II, and the 60th anniversary of the recognition by the Holy See of the Statutes of the International Federation of Catholic Universities (FIUC).

I am pleased to commemorate with you these important anniversaries which give me the opportunity to highlight once again the irreplaceable role of ecclesiastical faculties and Catholic universities in the Church and in society. The Second Vatican Council clearly stressed this in the Declaration Gravissimum Educationis when it urged ecclesiastical faculties to promote research in the various sectors of the sacred sciences for an ever deeper understanding of Revelation, in order to explore the inheritance of Christian wisdom, to foster ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and to find answers to the problems that are emerging in the cultural context (cf. n. 11). The same conciliar Document recommended the promotion of Catholic universities, opening them throughout the various regions of the world and, above all, ensuring that they maintain a high

standard in order to educate people steeped in knowledge, ready to witness in the world to their faith and to undertake the responsible duties of society (cf. n. 10). The Council's invitation has reverberated throughout the Church. Today, in fact, there are more than 1,300 Catholic universities and about 400 ecclesiastical faculties, spread throughout the continents, many of which have been founded in recent decades; they are proof of the increasing attention of particular Churches to the formation of clerics and lay people in culture and research.

From its very first words the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana*, points out the urgent, ever timely need to bridge the gap between faith and culture. It calls for a greater commitment to evangelization in the firm conviction that Christian Revelation is a transforming force, destined to permeate mindsets, standards of judgement and behavioural norms. It is able to illuminate, purify and renew people's morals and culture (cf. *Foreword*, i, n. i), and must constitute the focal point of teaching and research, as well as the horizon that illumines the nature and objective of every ecclesiastical faculty. In this perspective, the duty of scholars of the sacred disciplines to achieve, through theological research, a more profound knowledge of the revealed truth is emphasized. At the same time, interactions with other fields of knowledge are encouraged for fruitful dialogue, especially in order to make a precious contribution to the mission the Church is called to carry out in the world. After 30 years, the fundamental lines of the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana* still retain all their timeliness. Indeed, in contemporary society where knowledge is becoming ever more specialized and compartmentalized but is profoundly marked by relativism, it is more necessary than ever to be open to the "wisdom" that comes from the Gospel. The human being, in fact, is incapable of fully understanding himself and the world without Jesus Christ. Christ alone illumines his true dignity, his vocation and his ultimate destiny and opens the heart to firm and lasting hope.

Dear friends, your commitment to serving the truth that God has revealed to us is part of the evangelizing mission that Christ has entrusted to the Church: it is therefore an ecclesial service. *Sapientia Christiana* cites in this regard the conclusion of the Gospel according to Matthew: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt 28: 19-20). It is important for everyone, teachers and students alike, never to lose sight of the objective to be pursued, namely, that of being an instrument for proclaiming the Gospel. The years of advanced ecclesiastical studies can be compared to the experience that the Apostles lived with Jesus: in being with him they learned the truth, in order to become its heralds everywhere. At the same time, it is important to remember that the study of the sacred sciences must never be separated from prayer, from union with God, from contemplation as I recalled in my recent Catecheses on medieval monastic theology otherwise reflection on the mysteries risks becoming a vain intellectual exercise. Every sacred science, in the end, refers to the "knowledge of the saints", to their intuition of the mysteries of the living God, to wisdom, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit and the soul of the "*fides quaerens intellectum*" (cf. *General Audience, 21 October 2009*).

The FIUC came into being in 1924 at the initiative of several Rectors and was recognized 25 years later by the Holy See. Dear Rectors of Catholic universities, the 60th anniversary of the canonical erection of your Federation is an especially favourable opportunity to review its achievements and to plot the course of its future commitments.

Celebrating an anniversary means giving thanks to God who has guided our footsteps, but it is also drawing from our own history a further impetus to renew the will to serve the Church. In this regard, your motto is also a programme for the Federation's future: "Sciat ut serviat", to know in order to serve. In a culture which demonstrates: "a lack of wisdom and reflection, a lack of thinking capable of formulating a guiding synthesis" (Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 31), faithful to their own identity which makes Christian inspiration a defining feature, Catholic universities are called to promote a "new humanistic synthesis" (*ibid.*, n. 21), knowledge that is "wisdom capable of directing man in the light of his first beginnings and his final ends" (*ibid.*, n. 30), knowledge illumined by faith.

Dear friends, the service you carry out is precious for the Church's mission. As I express to all my sincere good wishes for the academic year that has just begun and for the complete success of the FIUC Assembly, I entrust each one of you and the institutions you represent to the maternal protection of Mary Most Holy, Seat of Wisdom, and I gladly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you all.

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