



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION
FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION ON THE OCCASION
OF THE 25th ANNIVERSARY OF THE PROMULGATION
OF THE APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTION SAPIENTIA CHRISTIANA**

Tuesday, 27 April 2004

*Your Eminence,
Venerable Brother Bishops and Priests,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. I am truly pleased that you wished to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the important Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana*, which I signed shortly after the beginning of my Pontificate. This Constitution is important to me because it treats the practice of the Church's "*munus docendi*".

The "duty to teach" is of particular importance in modern-day society, which is on one hand marked by impressive technical advances, and on the other, by glaring contradictions, divisions and tensions.

In reality, the Gospel exercises its long-lasting and beneficial effect only in the measure in which, through continual proclamation, "*convenient or inconvenient*" (cf. II Tm 4: 2), it permeates ways of thinking and penetrates all culture (cf. Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana*, Foreword I).

Now, it is this "high" vocation that distinguishes Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties: to strive with all their might to reunite the world of science and culture with the truth of faith in order to rediscover the salvific order of the divine plan in the reality of today's world.

2. I rejoice in the growing number of ecclesiastical centres of academic teaching. Their principal mission continues to be deepening and transmitting the divine mystery revealed by Christ. It is the Holy Spirit, received in the Church, who introduces us into that mystery and leads us to penetrate it by means of ever-deeper study (cf. Heb 6: 4).

Special prestige and responsibility pertain to the ecclesiastical faculties of Theology, Canon Law and Philosophy "because of their particular nature and importance for the Church" (*Sapientia Christiana*, art. 65). However, beyond these fundamental disciplines, ecclesiastical faculties include many other fields, such as Church History, Liturgy, Educational Science and Sacred Music.

In recent years, much effort has been exerted to meet the current needs: particular attention has been dedicated, for example, to bioethics, Islamic studies, human mobility, etc. So I warmly encourage the initiatives that aim at deepening the bonds which exist between divine Revelation and the newest areas of knowledge in today's society.

3. Today, more than ever, the ecclesiastical universities and faculties are called to play a role in the "great springtime" that God is preparing for Christianity (cf. Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 86). People today are more attentive to certain values: the protection of human dignity; the defence of the weak and marginalized; respect for nature; the rejection of violence; world solidarity, etc. In light of the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana*, the Church's academic institutions are engaged in cultivating this sensibility according to the Gospel, Church Tradition and the Magisterium. It is well-known how much the modern world is threatened by ever-deepening rifts, such as that between rich and poor nations. These faults originate in the distancing of man from God.

In various Encyclicals, I have tried to point out the path to achieve profound reconciliation between faith and reason (cf. *Fides et Ratio*), between the good and the true (cf. *Veritatis Splendor*), between faith and culture (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*), between civil law and moral law (cf. *Evangelium Vitae*), between the West and the East (cf. *Slavorum Apostoli*), between the North and the South (cf. *Centesimus Annus*), etc. It is necessary that these cultural ecclesiastical institutions accept these teachings, study and apply them, and develop them. In harmony with their vocation, they contribute in this way to healing men and women's interior wounds and to overcoming their fears.

4. The present-day traps of individualism, pragmatism and rationalism are well-known and they have even spread into the areas responsible for formation. Cultural ecclesiastical institutions must strive tirelessly to unite the obedience of faith to the "boldness of reason" (*Fides et Ratio*, n. 48), allowing themselves to be guided by the zeal of charity. Lecturers must not forget that teaching is inseparable from the duty to deepen truth, especially revealed truth. Therefore, they should not separate the rigour of their university work from humble and ready openness to the Word of God, written or transmitted, always keeping in mind that the authentic interpretation of Revelation has been entrusted "to the living teaching office of the Church alone", exercising its authority in the name of Jesus Christ (Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, n. 10).

5. On this 25th anniversary of the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana*, I warmly thank all

those involved in the advancement of the ecclesiastical mission of teaching and scientific research in the Church: rectors, deans and heads of ecclesiastical universities and faculties, teaching staff and assistants, together with the Congregation for Catholic Education and within it the Office for Universities. To each one I extend my gratitude for all the work carried out with generous dedication.

I encourage everyone to continue their important mission of evangelization by way of the intelligence of Revelation, continuing to follow that "living synthesis" of revealed truth and human values which make up "Christian wisdom" (*Sapientia Christiana*, Foreword I). The world has great need of this.

6. As I assure you of my prayer for your work, I willingly impart to each and all a special Apostolic Blessing.