



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE COLLEGE OF ST PETER APOSTLE**

Saturday, 14 June 1997

Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

1. I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the Pontifical College of St Peter Apostle, which was celebrated on 22 February last, the Feast of the Chair of St Peter.

I address a very special greeting to Cardinals Bernardin Gantin and Francis Arinze, former students of the college. I also greet Cardinal Jozef Tomko, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, on which the college depends. My thoughts then go to the rector, Fr Manfred Müller, and through him I would like to express my fervent thanks to all the Verbite Fathers and Brothers who in recent decades have co-operated in the management of the institute; I also thank the religious sisters for their valuable contribution.

2. In the early 1940's, Mons. Celso Costantini, President of the Pontifical Society of St Peter Apostle, sponsored the construction of an urban college for priests from mission countries, who were sent to Rome to complete their ecclesiastical studies. The new institute was canonically erected by the Sacred Congregation of "Propaganda Fide" on 18 January 1947. The following year, on the eve of the Solemnity of Sts Peter and Paul, Pope Pius XII, for the college's inauguration, addressed a special Apostolic Exhortation to indigenous priests from all mission territories. Three years later, in the Encyclical *Evangelii praecones*, speaking of the developments of the missionary apostolate, my venerable Predecessor also mentioned the "Collegio Petriano sul Gianicolo", in which", he wrote, "indigenous priests are formed in the most thorough and suitable way in the sacred disciplines, in virtue, in the apostolate" (Pius XII, Encyclical Letter

Evangelii praecones on the development of the missionary apostolate, 2 June 1951, AAS, XLIII [1951], 500).

3. Dear friends, it was impossible for me to come and meet you at the college as I would have warmly wished to do, and as Pope Paul VI did for the 25th anniversary of the foundation, when he celebrated a memorable Mass of Pentecost there. On that special occasion, he said to the students: “We see in you, brothers and dear sons, candidates for the ministry of evangelization, a symbol of the chorus of all peoples, present and future, who, in unison and yet each in his own tongue, will tell of man’s salvation in Christ our Lord” (*Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, X, [1972], 538; *L’Osservatore Romano* English edition, 1 June 1972, p. 10). In the climate of Pentecost, the College of St Peter Apostle appeared in the fullness of its “Catholic” vocation, a “house full of charity and truth, built for the express purpose of preaching our faith to the whole world — a faith ... actual and living, one and universal, dynamic and apostolic” (ibid.).

4. Today, looking at these 50 years which constitute the second half of the 20th century, one thinks spontaneously: how many changes there have been in the world and in the Church! At the same time, on the threshold of the third millennium, as humanity appears more than ever in need of truth, justice and hope, the Church renews her unchanging message: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever! (Heb 13:8). So, the reasons that led to the creation of this institute are more than ever valid and timely. It presents itself today as a valuable tool in the service of the new evangelization, of that *Redemptoris missio* which, “entrusted to the Church, is still very far from completion”, indeed it “is still only beginning”, and we need to “commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service” (*Redemptoris missio*, n. 1).

To respond faithfully and appropriately to Christ’s mandate, the ministers of the Gospel need suitable premises for formation, just as the Upper Room was indispensable for the group of the Twelve. The College of St Peter Apostle is an authentic Upper Room for apostolic formation, where priests from all parts of the world are totally dedicated to prayer, study, fraternal life, so that their ministry may fully conform to the needs of the Church’s mission, and the Gospel may follow its course to the very ends of the earth.

Dear friends, this is my thought and my wish as I look at you today. This is my prayer, through the intercession of the Queen and of the Prince of the Apostles. And as I entrust to the Lord the almost 2,000 priests who, in the past 50 years, have been trained within the hospitable walls of the College of St Peter Apostle, I warmly impart my Blessing to you, today’s formation staff and students and to everyone present.

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