



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE ADMINISTRATORS OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF ROME,
THE PROVINCE OF ROME AND THE REGION OF LAZIO
FOR THE TRADITIONAL EXCHANGE OF NEW YEAR GREETINGS***

*Clementine Hall
Monday, 12 January 2009*

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the beginning of the new year the Pope's welcoming at his home of the administrators of the Municipality of Rome, the Province of Rome and the Region of Lazio for a cordial exchange of good wishes is a good tradition. This meeting is taking place this morning in an atmosphere of esteem and sincere friendship. I therefore thank you for your appreciated presence. I address a respectful greeting in the first place to the President of the Regional Administrative Board of Lazio, Mr Pietro Marrazzo, to the Mayor of Rome, Hon. Mr Gianni Alemanno, and to the President of the Province of Rome, Mr Nicola Zingaretti. I thank them for their courteous words, also on behalf of their respective Boards. I extend my greeting to the Presidents of the various conciliar Assemblies and to each one of you present here, to your families and to the beloved populations whom you represent in spirit.

In the speeches that have just been delivered, I discerned both hopes and anxieties. The world community is undoubtedly experiencing a serious economic crisis but it is also connected with a crisis in structures, culture and values. The difficult situation which is increasingly affecting the world economy brings with it inevitable consequences and thus also affects Rome, its Province and the cities and towns of Lazio. In the face of this demanding challenge which your words also made clear the desire to react must be unanimous, overcoming divisions and orchestrating strategies which, if on the one hand deal with today's emergencies, on the other aim to draw up a coordinated strategic policy for the years ahead, inspired by those principles and values that are part of the spiritual patrimony of Italy and, more specifically, of Rome and Lazio. At difficult times in

their history, the population has been able to rediscover unity of will and courage under the wise guidance of enlightened administrators whose fundamental concern has been the good of all.

Dear friends, it was clear from your speeches that the Administrative Boards you direct appreciate the presence and activity of the Catholic community. Here I am eager to reaffirm that it neither requests nor boasts of privileges but desires that its own spiritual and social mission may continue to meet with appreciation and cooperation. I thank you for your availability; indeed, I remember that Rome and Lazio play a special role for Christianity. Catholics here feel encouraged to bear a lively Gospel witness and an industrious action for human advancement, especially today, as we face the difficulties with which we are all too familiar. In this regard, although the diocesan branches of *Caritas*, parish communities and Catholic associations are sparing no effort to provide help to those in need, giving practical responses to people's growing needs, synergy among all the Institutions is becoming indispensable. I am thinking here of families, especially those with small children who have the right to a serene future, and of the elderly, many of whom live alone in conditions of hardship; I am thinking of the housing emergency; of the lack of employment and of the unemployment among the young; of the difficult coexistence between different ethnic groups; of the urgent question of immigration and itinerant people.

If the implementation of appropriate economic and social policies is the task of the State, the Church, in the light of her social doctrine, is required to make her contribution, stimulating reflection and forming the consciences of the faithful and of all citizens of goodwill. Perhaps, never so much as today, civil society is realizing that it is only with lifestyles inspired by moderation, solidarity and responsibility that it is possible to build a more just society and a better future for all. It is part of the institutional duty of public authorities to guarantee to all inhabitants their proper rights, bearing in mind that the duties of each one should be clearly defined and properly implemented. This is why a priority that cannot be postponed is the inculcation of respect for the law, the assumption of one's own responsibilities and the structuring of life in such a way as to reduce individualism and the defence of personal interests in order to strive together for the common good, with special concern for the expectations of the weakest members of the population, who must not be considered a burden but a resource to advance.

In this perspective, with an intuition that I would call prophetic, the Church has been focusing her efforts on the issue of education for years. I would like here to express my gratitude for the collaboration established between your Administrative Boards and the ecclesial communities with regard to after school recreation and prayer centres and the building of new parish complexes in districts with none. I feel that this mutual support with respect for the reciprocal competences, will be further strengthened in the future, bearing in mind that in addition to providing for the practice of the fundamental right of the human person which is religious freedom the Church's structures in the heart of a neighbourhood are actually places for gathering and for formation in the values of sociability, peaceful coexistence, brotherhood and peace.

How is it possible not to think especially of the children and young people who are our future? Every time that the news reports episodes of violence perpetrated by youth, every time that the press covers road accidents in which many young people are killed, I remember the issue of the educational emergency which today demands the broadest possible collaboration. Especially among young people the natural and Christian values that give meaning to daily life and teach people to have a view of life that is open to hope are being eroded. Transient wishes and short-lived expectations surface that in the end breed boredom and failure. The negative outcome of all this is the affirmation of tendencies to trivialize the value of life itself, to seek refuge in transgression, drugs or alcohol, which for some people have even become a regular weekend rite. Even love risks being reduced to a "mere 'thing' to be bought and sold", indeed "man himself becomes a commodity" (*Deus caritas est*, n. 5). In the face of the nihilism that increasingly pervades the world of youth, the Church asks everyone to devote themselves to young people seriously and not to leave them at their own mercy, exposed to the school of "bad teachers", but rather to involve them in serious initiatives that enable them to understand the value of life in a stable family founded on marriage. Only in this way are they given the possibility to plan their future with trust. As for the ecclesial community, it should make itself even more available to help the new generations of Rome and Lazio to plan their future responsibly. Above all, it introduces them to the love of Christ, the only love that can provide fulfilling answers to the deepest questions of our hearts.

Lastly, allow me to make a brief reflection on the world of health care. I am aware of how demanding the task of guaranteeing adequate health-care assistance to all in the area of both physical and mental diseases is, and of the enormous costs that must be met. In this sector too, as moreover in the education sector, the ecclesial community heir to a long tradition of assistance to the sick continues to offer its activities, with many sacrifices, in hospitals and treatment centres that are inspired by Gospel principles. In the year that has just ended, on the part of the Lazio Region, even amid the difficulties of the current situation, positive signs could be seen in providing for the needs of Catholic health-care structures also. I am confident that by persevering in the current efforts this collaboration will be appropriately encouraged, in such a way that people continue to avail themselves of the precious service that these recognized structures carry out with competence, professionalism, perspicacity in their financial management and caring concern to the sick and their families.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, the task that the citizens have entrusted to you is not an easy one: you must contend with numerous and complex situations that always more frequently require interventions and decisions that are not simple and are sometimes unpopular. May you find encouragement and comfort in the knowledge that while you are rendering an important service to contemporary society you are also helping to build a truly human world for the new generations. The most important contribution of which the Pope assures you, and he does so with great affection, are his daily prayers that the Lord may enlighten you and make you always worthy servants of the common good. With these sentiments, I invoke the motherly intercession of Our

Lady, venerated in so many places in Lazio, and of the Apostle Paul, the 2,000th anniversary of whose birth we are commemorating, and I implore God's Blessing upon you, upon your families and upon all who live in Rome, in its Province and throughout the Region.

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