



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION**

Consistory Hall

Monday, 7 February 2011

Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I address to each one of you my cordial greeting at your visit on the occasion of the Plenary Meeting of the Congregation for Catholic Education. I greet Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski, Prefect of the Dicastery, and thank him for his courteous words, as well the Secretary, the Undersecretary, the Officials and the Co-Workers.

The common denominator of the topics you are addressing in these days is education and formation, which today constitute one of the most urgent challenges that the Church and her institutions are called to face. The task of educating seems to have become increasingly difficult because, in a culture which all too often makes relativism its creed, the light of truth is lacking; indeed it is even considered dangerous to speak of truth, thereby sowing doubt on the basic values of personal and community life. This explains the importance of the service that the many educational institutions inspired by the Christian vision of man and of reality carry out in the world. Educating is an act of love, an exercise of “intellectual charity” which calls for responsibility, dedication and a consistent life. Your Congregation’s work and the decisions you make during these days of reflection and study will certainly contribute to responding to the current “educational emergency”.

Your Congregation, established by Benedict XV in 1915, has carried out its invaluable work in service to the various Catholic educational institutions for almost 100 years. There is no doubt that the seminary is one of the most important of these institutions for the life of the Church and

therefore requires a formative plan that will take into account the above-mentioned context.

On various occasions I have emphasized that the seminary is a precious stage of life in which the candidate to the priesthood experiences being “a disciple of Jesus”. This training period requires a certain detachment, a certain “desert”, so that the Lord may speak to hearts with a voice that is heard if there is silence (*cf.* I Kings 19:12); but also required is the willingness to live together, to love “family life” and the community dimension, which anticipate the “sacramental brotherhood” which must characterize every diocesan priest (*cf.* *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 8) I also wished to recall this in my recent *Letter to Seminarians*: “one does not become a priest on one’s own. The “community of disciples” is essential, the unity of those who desire to serve the greater Church.

In these days, you are also studying the draft of the Document: *The Internet and formation in seminaries*. Because of its ability to cover distances and put people in touch with each other, the Internet also presents great possibilities for the Church and her mission. With the necessary discernment for its intelligent and judicious use, the Internet is an instrument that can serve not only for study but also for the pastoral action of future priests in the various ecclesial areas, such as evangelization, missionary action, catechesis, educational projects and the management of institutions. In this field too it is extremely important to be able to rely on properly trained formation teachers who will be faithful and ever up-to-date guides in order to assist candidates to the priesthood in the correct and positive use of information technology.

This year is the 70th anniversary of the Pontifical Work for Priestly Vocations, set up by Venerable Pius XII to encourage collaboration between the Holy See and the local Churches in the valuable work of promoting vocations to the ordained ministry. This anniversary serves as an opportunity to know and to evaluate the most important vocational projects promoted in the local Churches. In addition to emphasizing the value of the universal call to follow Jesus, the pastoral care of vocations must insist more clearly on the profile of the ministerial priesthood, characterized by its specific configuration to Christ, which essentially sets it apart from the other faithful and puts it at their service.

Furthermore, you have started to revise what the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana* prescribes on ecclesiastical studies, with regard to Canon Law, Higher Institutes for Religious Studies and, recently, philosophy. Theology is a sector that calls for special reflection. It is important to strengthen increasingly the bond between theology and the study of Sacred Scripture, so that the latter may truly be its heart and soul (*cf.* *Verbum Domini*, n. 31).

Nevertheless the theologian must not forget that he is also the one who speaks to God. Hence it is indispensable to keep theology closely united with personal and community prayer and, especially, with liturgical prayer. Theology is *scientia fidei* and prayer nourishes faith. In the union with God, mystery is in a certain way, savoured, it makes itself close, and this closeness enlightens the mind.

I would also like to stress the connection between theology and the other disciplines, given that it is taught at Catholic, and, in many cases, at secular universities. Bl. John Henry Newman spoke of the “circle of knowledge”, to indicate that an interdependence exists between the various branches of knowledge; but God and God alone has a relationship with the whole of reality; consequently, eliminating God means breaking the circle of knowledge. In this perspective, Catholic universities, with their specific identity and their openness to the “totality” of the human being, can carry out a valuable task to further the unity of knowledge, guiding students and teachers to the Light of the world, “the true light that enlightens every man” (Jn 1:9). These are considerations that also apply to Catholic schools. First of all there must be the courage to proclaim the “broad” value of education, in order to form solid people who can collaborate with others and give meaning to their lives. Today there is talk of *intercultural education*, which is also an object of study at your Plenary Assembly.

In this realm courageous and innovative fidelity are required that can combine a clear awareness of one’s own identity with openness to others because of the requirements of coexistence in multicultural societies. To this end the educational role of *teaching the Catholic religion* is also emerging as an academic subject in an interdisciplinary dialogue with others. In fact, this makes a considerable contribution not only to the student’s integral development, but also to knowledge of the other, to mutual understanding and respect. To achieve these objectives special attention must be given to the training of leaders and formation teachers, not only from the professional but also from the religious and spiritual viewpoints so that the Christian educator’s presence, with the consistency of his or her life and with personal involvement, will be an expression of love and a witness of the truth.

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank you for all you do with your competent work at the service of educational institutions. Always keep your gaze fixed on Christ, the only Teacher, so that with his Spirit he will make your work effective. I entrust you to the motherly protection of Mary Most Holy, *Sedes Sapientiae*, and I cordially impart the Apostolic Blessing to you all.