



The Holy See

*Discours aux Élèves de l'Académie Pontificale Ecclésiastique*21 janvier 1989*

I thank you for your visit; this annual presence witnesses to an important ecclesial fact, because you are priests destined to the service of the Pope and of the Holy See, with an international character aimed at expressing both the unity and the universality of the Church.

I am happy to have the opportunity to reflect briefly with you on your ministry, both present and future.

You have freely heard the call of the Apostolic See to live during these years as members of a priestly community, which has important requirements. Yours should be a community ever worthy of the Apostolic Church, a community dedicated to the teaching of the Apostles, to brotherly fellowship, to the Eucharist and to prayer (cf. Acts 2:42). The Academy is a priestly community which, as such, should draw and nourish itself on the highest doctrinal and pastoral ideals of the priesthood of Christ. Indeed, it supplies you with every opportunity to prepare yourselves for your future mission, which is essentially a priestly mission. You have at your disposal years of study, years of grace.

2. The period in question is one in which you will be called to open yourselves, through prayer, to the Holy Spirit, who desires to effect in your hearts an operation of conversion and of inner elevation. The years spent in the Academy should be years of spiritual growth in pastoral zeal and in fraternal charity which are necessary for developing a sensitivity towards others, for coming to know the needs of the universal Church and for beginning to understand the culture of your numerous brothers and colleagues.

The period at the Academy is very propitious indeed for reflecting on the future task which will eventually be entrusted to you in the Pontifical Missions or in the Roman Curia. However, your reflections should be carried out in the context of a profound self-offering to God.

The years which you spend in the historic institution will be invaluable for perfecting you in the priestly virtues, dedicating you, from now on, to the cause of the unity of the Church; and getting to know Jesus intimately, so that you assimilate his thoughts, sentiments and desires, and assume his attitude of service. Every priest, in fact, exists and works in order to serve others, like Jesus, who said of himself: "For their sake I consecrate myself" (Jn 17 19).

3. Yes, dearest brothers, the spirit which tomorrow should permeate your specific ministry for the Holy See is that of

diaconia, that is a humble, persevering, loyal, loving and generous service to the Church and to souls. This explains your identity. To prepare yourselves for this apostolic future and to confront the various problems you will encounter in the different countries to which you will be sent requires a constant availability and an enduring capacity to adapt to ever new and sometimes difficult situations.

It is indispensable therefore that you give an absolute pre-eminence to the spiritual life; that you live each day to the full the demands of your priestly consecration; and that you learn to focus your attention on what is essential. Thus you will not allow yourselves to be taken in by the attraction of what is external, but be authentic witnesses to inner freedom in a world marked by an unbridled search for one's own convenience and self-satisfaction, at the expense of moral principles and of solidarity with others. In other words, the Apostolic See demands the total gift of yourselves to the mission of Christ and his Church. Only with this supernatural attitude will you be truly capable of collaborating in the ecclesial mission of the Holy See, for the cause of the Gospel.

You will be called, then, to collaborate in promoting ecclesial communion, especially between the local Churches and the universal Church. You will be servants of collegiality in its essential relationship with the ministry of Peter. You should also be able to contribute, as collaborators of the Holy See, to all the great causes of humanity, such as peace, human rights, international cooperation and universal solidarity.

This collaboration will express itself also in the numerous humble tasks which will form the fabric of your daily lives. It is important that you are aware that in this way your lives of service have a great value for the Kingdom of God and that your generosity is an offering pleasing to the Lord for the salvation of the world.

4. I pray that Mary be ever your model of generosity in your following of Christ, and that her words "let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1: 38) invite you to an ever more profound and personal engagement. For my part, I thank you for your love for the Church and for your willingness to serve her, and I bless you in the name of Christ the Lord.

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