



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY MEETING
OF THE CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION
(FOR SEMINARIES AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS)**

Clementine Hall

Monday, 21 January 2008

Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Thank you for your visit which you are making on the occasion of the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for Catholic Education: my cordial greeting to each one of you. I greet in the first place Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski, Prefect of your Dicastery, and together with him, the new Secretary and other Officials and Collaborators. I extend special thanks to you, Your Eminence, for your words to me, presenting the various topics on which the Congregation intends to reflect on in these days. They are subjects of great interest and timeliness to which, especially at this moment in history, the Church addresses her attention.

The education sector is particularly dear to the Church, called to make her own the concern of Christ, who, the Evangelist recounts, in seeing the crowds, took "compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things" (Mk 6: 34). The Greek word that expresses this attitude of "compassion" calls to mind the depths of mercy and refers to the profound love that the Heavenly Father feels for man. Tradition has seen teaching - and more generally, education - as a concrete manifestation of spiritual mercy, which constitutes one of the first works of love which is the Church's mission to offer to humanity. It is particularly appropriate that people in our time are reflecting on how to make current and effective this apostolic task of the Ecclesial Community, entrusted to *Catholic universities* and in a special manner to *ecclesiastical faculties*. I therefore rejoice with you that you have chosen a theme of such great interest for your Plenary Meeting, just as I also believe it will be useful to make a

careful analysis of the projects for reform that are currently being studied by your Dicastery concerning the above-mentioned Catholic universities and ecclesiastical faculties.

In the first place, I refer to the reform of ecclesiastical studies of philosophy, a project which has now reached the last stages of its elaboration, in which the metaphysical and sapiential dimensions of philosophy, mentioned by John Paul II in his Encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (cf. n. 81), will certainly be emphasized. It would likewise be useful to assess the expediency of a reform of the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana*. Desired by my venerable Predecessor in 1979, it constitutes the *magna carta* of ecclesiastical faculties and serves as a basis for formulating criteria for evaluating the quality of these institutions, an evaluation required by the Bologna Process which the Holy See joined in 2003. Today, the ecclesiastical disciplines, especially theology, are subjected to new questions in a world tempted on the one hand by rationalism which follows a falsely free rationality disconnected from any religious reference, and on the other, by fundamentalisms that falsify the true essence of religion with their incitement to violence and fanaticism.

Schools should also question themselves on the role they must fulfil in the contemporary social context, marked by an evident educational crisis. The Catholic school, whose primary mission is to form students in accordance with an integral anthropological vision while remaining open to all and respecting the identity of each one, cannot fail to propose its own educational, human and Christian perspective. Here then, a new challenge is posed which globalization and increasing pluralism make even more acute: in other words, the challenge of the encounter of religions and cultures in the common search for the truth. The acceptance of the cultural plurality of pupils and parents must necessarily meet two requirements: on the one hand, not to exclude anyone in the name of his or her cultural or religious membership; on the other, once this cultural and religious difference has been recognized and accepted, not to stop at the mere observation of it. This would in fact be equivalent to denying that cultures truly respect one another when they meet, because all authentic cultures are oriented to the truth about man and to his good. Therefore, people who come from different cultures can speak to one another and understand one another over and above distances in time and space, because in the heart of every person dwells the same great aspirations to goodness, justice, truth, life and love.

Another theme being studied at your Plenary Assembly is the question concerning the reform of the *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis* for seminaries. The basic document, dated 1970, was updated in 1985, especially subsequent to the promulgation of the Code of Canon Law in 1983. In the decades that followed, various texts of special importance were promulgated, in particular the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992). The present atmosphere in society, with the massive influence of the media and the expansion of the phenomenon of globalization, is profoundly changed. It would thus seem necessary to question oneself on the expediency of the reform of the *Ratio fundamentalis*, which should emphasize the importance of a correct articulation of the various dimensions of priestly formation in the

perspective of the Church-communion, following the instructions of the Second Vatican Council. This implies a solid formation in the faith of the Church and true familiarity with the revealed Word given by God to his Church. The formation of future priests, moreover, must offer useful guidelines and directions for carrying on a dialogue with the contemporary cultures. Human and cultural formation should therefore be significantly reinforced and sustained, also with the help of the modern sciences, since certain destabilizing social factors that exist in the world today (for example, the plight of so many broken families, the educational crisis, widespread violence, etc.) render the new generations fragile.

At the same time, an adequate formation in the spiritual life, which makes Christian communities and especially parishes ever more aware of their vocation and able to respond satisfactorily to the question of spirituality that comes especially from young people, must take place. This requires that the Church not lack well-qualified and responsible apostles and evangelizers. Consequently, the problem of vocations arises, especially to the priesthood and the consecrated life. While in some parts of the world vocations are visibly flourishing, elsewhere the number is dwindling, especially in the West. The care of vocations involves the whole Ecclesial Community: Bishops, priests, consecrated persons and also families and parishes. The publication of the Document on the vocation to the presbyteral ministry which you are preparing will certainly be a great help to your pastoral action.

Dear brothers and sisters, I recalled earlier that teaching is an expression of Christ's charity and is the first of the spiritual works of mercy that the Church is called to carry out. Those who enter the offices of the Congregation for Catholic Education are welcomed by an icon that shows Jesus washing his disciples' feet during the Last Supper. May the One who "loved [us] to the end" (cf. Jn 13: 1) bless your work at the service of education and, with the power of his Spirit, make it effective. For my part, I thank you for all you do daily with competence and dedication, and while I entrust you to the maternal protection of Mary Most Holy, the Wise Virgin and Mother of Love, I cordially impart the Apostolic Blessing to you all.