



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO BISHOPS AND REPRESENTATIVES
OF ECCLESIAL MOVEMENTS AND NEW COMMUNITIES***

Consistory Hall
Saturday, 17 May 2008

*Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of the Study Seminar convoked by the Pontifical Council for the Laity to reflect on the pastoral care of the Ecclesial Movements and New Communities. I thank the many Prelates from every part of the world who have graced the Seminar with their presence: their interest and lively participation have guaranteed the successful outcome of this session which has now reached its last day. I address to all my Brothers in the Episcopate and to everyone present a cordial greeting of communion and peace; in particular, I greet Cardinal Stanisław Ryłko and Bishop Josef Clemens, respectively President and Secretary of the Dicastery, and their collaborators.

It is not the first time that the Council for the Laity has organized a Seminar for Bishops on lay movements. I well remember that of 1999, the ideal follow-up of the Meeting of my Beloved Predecessor John Paul II with the Movements and New Communities, held on 30 May in the previous year. As Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith I was involved in the discussion in the first person. I was able to establish a direct dialogue with the Bishops, a frank, brotherly exchange on a great number of important matters. Today's Seminar, in a similar fashion, is intended as a follow-up to the [Meeting I myself had on 3 June 2006](#) with a large group of the faithful representing more than 100 new lay associations. On that occasion, I indicated that the Ecclesial Movements and New Communities and their experience are a "luminous sign of the beauty of Christ and of the Church, his Bride" (cf. [Message to the participants at the Congress, held on 22 May 2006](#)). In addressing the "dear friends of the Movements", I urged them to be

increasingly "schools of communion, groups journeying on, in which one learns to live in the truth and love that Christ revealed and communicated to us through the witness of the Apostles, in the heart of the great family of his disciples" (*ibid.*).

The Ecclesial Movements and New Communities are one of the most important innovations inspired by the Holy Spirit in the Church for the implementation of the Second Vatican Council. They spread in the wake of the Council sessions especially in the years that immediately followed it, in a period full of exciting promises but also marked by difficult trials. Paul VI and John Paul II were able to welcome and discern, to encourage and promote the unexpected explosion of the new lay realities which in various and surprising forms have restored vitality, faith and hope to the whole Church. Indeed, even then they were already bearing witness to the joy, reasonableness and beauty of being Christian, showing that they were grateful for belonging to the mystery of communion which is the Church. We have witnessed the reawakening of a vigorous missionary impetus, motivated by the desire to communicate to all the precious experience of the encounter with Christ, felt and lived as the only adequate response to the human heart's profound thirst for truth and happiness.

How is it possible not to realize at the same time that such newness is still waiting to be properly understood in the light of God's plan and of the Church's mission in the context of our time? Precisely because numerous interventions, appeals and directions succeeded one another on the part of the Pontiffs, who were first to initiate ever deeper dialogue and collaboration with numerous particular Churches. Many prejudices, forms of resistance and tensions were overcome. The important task of promoting a more mature communion of all the ecclesial elements, so that all the charisms, with respect for their specificity, may freely and fully contribute to the edification of the one Body of Christ.

I deeply appreciated that for the Seminar you chose to follow-up a theme from the exhortation I [addressed to a group of German Bishops on an *ad limina* visit](#), and which today I certainly address to all of you, the Pastors of so many particular Churches: "I... ask you to approach movements very lovingly" (18 November 2006). I could almost say that I have nothing else to add! Love is the distinctive sign of the Good Shepherd: it makes the exercise of the ministry that has been entrusted to us authoritative and effective. To meet the needs of the Movements and New Communities very lovingly, impels us to know their situation well, without superficial impressions or belittling judgements. It also helps us to understand that the Ecclesial Movements and New Communities are not an additional problem or risk that comes to top our already difficult task. No! they are a gift of the Lord, a valuable resource for enriching the entire Christian Community with their charisms. Consequently, trusting acceptance that makes room for them and appreciates their contributions to the life of the local Churches must not be absent. Difficulties or misunderstanding on specific questions do not authorize their closure. A "very loving" approach inspires prudence and patience. We Pastors are asked to accompany the Movements and the New Communities closely, with fatherly concern, cordially and wisely, so that they may generously make available for

use by all, in an orderly and fruitful manner, the many gifts they bear, which we have learned to recognize and appreciate: missionary enthusiasm, effective courses of Christian formation, a witness of faithfulness and obedience to the Church, sensitivity to the needs of the poor and a wealth of vocations.

The authenticity of new charisms is guaranteed by their readiness to submit to the discernment of the Ecclesiastical Authority. Already numerous Ecclesial Movements and New Communities have been recognized by the Holy See and therefore should certainly be considered a gift of God for the whole Church. Others, in a nascent phase, require the exercise of even more sensitive and watchful guidance by the Pastors of the particular Churches. Those who are called to a service of discernment and guidance should not claim to dominate charisms but rather to guard against the danger of suffocating them (cf. I Thes 5: 19-21), resisting the temptation to standardize what the Holy Spirit desired to be multi-form to contribute to building and extending the one Body of Christ, which the same Spirit renders firm in unity. Consecrated and assisted by the Spirit of God, in Christ, the Head of the Church, the Bishop must examine the charisms and test them, to recognize and appreciate what is good, true and beautiful, what contributes to the increase of holiness, of both individuals and communities. When correction is necessary, may it also be imparted with a "very loving" approach. The Movements and New Communities are proud of their associative freedom and faithfulness to their charism, but they have also shown that they are well aware that faithfulness and freedom are assured - and not, of course, limited - by ecclesial communion, whose ministers, custodians and guides are the Bishops, united to the Successor of Peter.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, at the end of this meeting I urge you to revive within you the gift you have received from your own consecration (cf. II Tm 1: 6). May the Spirit of God help us to recognize and preserve the marvels he himself inspires in the Church for the benefit of all men and women. I entrust to Mary Most Holy, Queen of Apostles, each one of your dioceses and, with all my heart, I impart to you an affectionate Apostolic Blessing which I extend to the priests, men and women religious, seminarians, catechists and all the lay faithful, and, today in particular, to the members of the Ecclesial Movements and New Communities present in the Church and entrusted to your care.