



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO COUNSELLORS AND MEMBERS
OF THE LATIN AMERICAN EPISCOPAL COMMISSION
ON THE OCCASION OF ITS PLENARY ASSEMBLY**

Consistory Hall

Friday, 20 February 2009

Your Eminences,

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I warmly greet the Counsellors and Members of the [Pontifical Commission for Latin America](#) which has reflected at its Plenary Assembly on "the current situation of priestly formation in seminaries" of that land. I am grateful for the words, on behalf of you all, of Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, President of the Commission, who has presented to me the central themes of your work and the pastoral recommendations that have emerged at this meeting.

I thank God for the fruit that this Pontifical Commission has borne in the Church since its foundation in 1958, when Pope [Pius XII](#) saw the need to create a body of the Holy See in order to intensify and coordinate more closely the work developed for the Church in Latin America, in the face of the scarcity of its priests and missionaries. My venerable Predecessor [John Paul II](#) confirmed and strengthened this initiative, aiming to highlight the special pastoral concern of the Successor of Peter for the pilgrim Churches in those beloved countries. At this new milestone of the Commission, I cannot fail to mention with deep gratitude the work carried out for many years by Bishop Cipriano Calderón Polo, its Vice-President who died recently and whom the Lord will have rewarded for his self-denial and faithful service to the Church.

Last year I received many Bishops from Latin America and the Caribbean who were making their *ad limina* visit. I discussed with them the reality of the particular Churches entrusted to them and was thereby enabled to gain a better knowledge of the hopes and difficulties of their apostolic ministry. I accompany them all with my prayers that they may continue to exercise with faithfulness

and joy their service to the People of God and give an impetus today to the "Continental Mission" that is being implemented as a fruit of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Conferences (cf. *Final Document*, n. 362).

I treasure grateful memories of my stay at [Aparecida](#) when we lived an experience of intense ecclesial communion with the one desire of welcoming the Gospel with humility and disseminating it generously. The theme chosen: "*Disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ, so that our peoples may have life in him*", continues to direct the efforts of the Church's members in those beloved nations.

When I summarized my [Apostolic Visit to Brazil](#) for the members of the Roman Curia, I asked myself: "was Aparecida right to give priority to the discipleship of Jesus Christ and to evangelization in the quest for the life of the world? Might it have been an erroneous withdrawal into interiority?" I answered, with total certainty: "No! Aparecida decided correctly because it is precisely through the new encounter with Jesus Christ and his Gospel and only in this way that forces are inspired which enable us to give the right response to the challenges of the time" ([Christmas Address to the Roman Curia](#), Friday, 21 December 2007). This personal encounter with the Lord, nourished by listening to his word and by participation in the Eucharist, as well as by the need to communicate our own experience of Christ with great enthusiasm, continues to be fundamental. As Bishops, successors of the Apostles, we are the first who must always keep alive the Lord's freely given loving call, like his call to the first disciples (cf. Mk 1: 16-20). Like them we too have been chosen "to be with him" (cf. Mk 3: 14), to welcome his word and to receive his strength, and thus to live like him, proclaiming to all the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

The period we spent at the seminary was a decisive time of discernment and preparation for us all. There, in profound dialogue with Christ, our desire to become deeply rooted in him was reinforced. In those years, we learned to feel at home in the Church, accompanied by Mary, the Mother of Jesus and our most beloved Mother, ever obedient to God's will. For this reason I am glad that this Plenary Assembly has focussed its attention on the current situation of seminaries in Latin America.

To succeed in becoming priests according to the Heart of Christ it is necessary to trust in the action of the Holy Spirit rather than in human strategies and calculations, and to ask the Lord, the "Lord of the Harvest", with great faith to send numerous holy vocations to the priesthood (cf. Lk 10: 2), always joining to this supplication affection and closeness for those who are at the seminary with the intention of taking Holy Orders. On the other hand, the need for priests in order to face the challenges of the contemporary world must not lead to neglecting a careful discernment of the candidates, nor to relaxing the necessary and strict requirements in order that their formation process may help them become exemplary priests.

Consequently, the pastoral recommendations of this Assembly must be an essential reference

point to illuminate the daily life of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops in this sensitive area of formation for the priesthood. Today, more than ever, it is necessary that seminarians with an upright intention and free of any other concern, aspire to the priesthood motivated solely by the desire to be authentic disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ. In communion with their Bishops they must make him present in their ministry and in their witness of life. For this reason it is of paramount importance that care and attention be paid to their human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation, as well as to the suitable choice of formation staff and professors. The latter must be distinguished by their academic ability, their priestly spirit and their fidelity to the Church, so that they are able to foster in the young men what the People of God need and what their pastors hope for.

I entrust to the maternal protection of the Most Holy Virgin Mary the projects of this Plenary Assembly, imploring her to accompany all those who are preparing for the priestly ministry treading in the footsteps of her divine Son Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. With these sentiments I warmly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you.

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