



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE WORLD CONGRESS
FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

Consistory Hall

Friday, 2 December 2011

Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Students,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of the Third World Congress for the Pastoral Care of International Students, organized by the [Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People](#). I greet and thank Archbishop Antonio Maria Vegliò for his kind words in opening this event. I likewise greet the Superiors and the Officials of the Dicastery and each one of you who have come from different parts of the world, especially from those countries with a high number of international students.

I would like to express my appreciation for your commitment to providing the young generation with guidance and support to improve their formation, addressing the challenges of a globalized and secularized world. I also greet in particular the international students present here, in the hope that, having received this special pastoral solicitude they may become protagonists in the Church's Mission.

I noted with great interest the theme you have chosen for this Congress: "International students and the encounter of cultures". The meeting of cultures is a fundamental reality in our epoch and for the future of humanity and of the Church. Men and women cannot reach a truly and fully human standard of living except through culture (Second Vatican Council, Apostolic Constitution [Gaudium et Spes](#), n. 53). The Church is attentive to the centrality of the human person both as the protagonist of cultural activities and as the ultimate recipient.

Today more than ever the openness of cultures to one another is the most fertile terrain for dialogue among those committed to seeking authentic humanism. The meeting of cultures in universities must, then, be encouraged and supported having human and Christian principles, the universal values, as its foundation so as to bring up a new generation capable of dialogue and discernment, committed to spreading respect and cooperation for peace and development.

Thanks to their intellectual, cultural and spiritual formation, international students have, in fact, the potential to become architects and protagonists of a more human world.

I sincerely hope that there are good syllabi at a continental and worldwide level to offer many young people this opportunity. Because of a shortage of qualified training and appropriate facilities in their own country or origin, as well as social and political tensions, and thanks to funds for study abroad, international students form an increasingly large group within the broader phenomenon of migration.

Therefore it is important to offer them a healthy and well-balanced intellectual, cultural and spiritual formation, so that they do not fall prey to the “brain drain” but become a consistent social and cultural group in view of their return as future leaders of their countries of origin where they can help to build cultural, social and spiritual “bridges” with their host countries.

Catholic universities and institutions of higher education are called to be “laboratories for humanity” by offering syllabi and courses which aim to encourage young students to search not only for a professional qualification, but also the answer to the question of happiness and sense of fullness, which dwells in the human heart.

The university world is a vital field for the evangelization of the Church. As I pointed out in my [Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees](#) for next year, when Christian universities are faithful to their true identity, they become places of witness, where Jesus Christ can be met and known, where one can experience his presence, that reconciles, calms, and instills new hope. The spread of “weak” ideologies in the various sectors of society urges Christians to make fresh efforts in the academic world, to encourage the new generations in their search for and discovery of the truth about man and God. Bl. John Henry Newman’s life, so strongly associated with the academic world, confirmed the importance and beauty of promoting an educational environment in which intellectual formation, ethics and religious commitment walk hand in hand.

University ministry is offered to young people as support for communion with Christ to lead them to perceive the deeper mystery of man and of history. The meeting between university students helps to discover and appreciate the hidden treasure in every international student, considering his/her presence as an enriching human, cultural and spiritual factor.

Young Christians, who come from different cultures but belong to the one Church of Christ, can

show that the Gospel is the Word of hope and salvation for men and women of every people and culture, of all ages and epochs, as I mentioned in my recent Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus* (cf. nn. 134, 138).

Dear young students, I encourage you to take advantage of your study time to grow in the knowledge and love of Christ, while you follow your itinerary of cultural and intellectual formation. Preserving your heritage of hope and faith, in the experience of your cultural formation abroad, may you value the universal opportunity of brotherhood and also the communication of the Gospel. I wish the work of your Congress success and I assure you of my prayers. I entrust to Mary, Mother of Jesus, the commitment and generosity of those who take care of migrants, in particular of students from abroad, and to all I warmly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you all.

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