



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO
THE PLENARY SESSION OF THE CONGREGATION
FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION** Monday 4 February 2002

Your Eminences,

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I am very happy to welcome you at the beginning of the Plenary Session of your Congregation. As I greet you warmly, I want to thank your Prefect, Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski for expressing your heartfelt sentiments of respect and homage.

I was attentive to what the Cardinal Prefect explained about your programme and I also saw the material prepared for these days of intense reflection. The Church lives on the continuous fraternal dialogue between the Roman Curia and the Episcopal Conferences. This dialogue normally takes place by way of regular correspondence, but at times it requires more sustained moments of sharing and dialogue. Your Plenary Congregation is one of these moments, that help to develop fruitful collaboration and reinforce the union of minds in the constant readiness for the service of ecclesial communion.

2. You are going to examine some Guidelines for the use of psychological expertise in the admission and formation of candidates to the *priesthood*. This document is intended to be a useful tool for those involved in the work of priestly formation, who are called to discern the suitability and vocation of a candidate for his own good and that of the Church. Of course, the contribution of psychology has to be incorporated in a balanced way within the process of vocational discernment where it becomes part of the overall process of formation in a way that safeguards the great value and role of spiritual direction. An atmosphere of faith in which, alone, the generous response to the vocation received from God can mature, will lead to a correct understanding of the meaning and use of psychology, that does not eliminate every difficulty and tension, but, encourages a broader awareness and freer exercise of personal freedom so that the candidate can take up an open and honest struggle; with the irreplaceable help of grace.

It will therefore be right to pay attention to the formation of expert psychologists, who, with good scientific qualifications, will also have a sound understanding of the Christian vision of life and of the vocation to the priesthood, so as to provide effective support for the necessary integration of the human and supernatural dimensions.

3. I also noted with pleasure the great commitment you have made to concluding the Apostolic Visitations to seminaries of common right and your desire to offer them a synthetic overview of the visits to guarantee their effectiveness.

Today, because of the general situation of the Church, it is especially important to pay attention to the seminaries. The intellectual and spiritual formation they impart must be of the highest calibre.

The candidates must be introduced to the practice of prayer, meditation and personal asceticism, based on the theological virtues lived in daily life.

It is especially necessary to foster in the students joy in their own vocation. Celibacy for the Kingdom of God must be presented as a choice that is eminently favourable for the joyful proclamation of the risen Christ. Along the same line, it will be important to instil in the souls of the seminarians the taste for ecclesial and apostolic charity: living in communion with Christ, with superiors and companions, is the most suitable preparation for their future ministerial obligations.

4. You also intend to discuss the formation of the students in canon law. This is a very relevant subject: canon law, based on the juridical and legislative legacy of a long tradition, is considered as a means that, within the primacy of love and grace, secures a just order in the life of the ecclesial society and of the persons who belong to the Church by virtue of Baptism.

In the present circumstances, the Church needs specialists in this discipline, to face today's juridical and pastoral needs that are more complex than they were in the past. The reflections you are proposing in this regard, with the contribution of the Fathers of the Plenary Session who have come from various parts of the world, will enable you to formulate the appropriate instructions for the future action of the Congregation.

5. During these days you will also be focusing on the role of consecrated persons (men and women religious), in the world of education. The Church is indebted to consecrated persons for the marvellous pages of holiness and dedication to the cause of education and evangelization they have written, especially, during the last two centuries. In the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata* I was able to highlight their indispensable role in the world of education. Today, while I am well aware of the difficulties of many religious families, I renew my invitation to consecrated persons to continue "to bring to bear on the world of education their radical witness to the values of the Kingdom" (n. 96).

A particular feature of the educational community operating in Catholic schools consists in the presence of both consecrated persons and lay people. Both can and must enrich the educational programme with their own experience. This will happen if, in their spiritual, ecclesial and professional formation, they are able to realize the goal of a shared mission.

6. In the area of vocations, there is the valuable work of the Pontifical Society for Ecclesiastical Vocations, that since 1941 has fostered the pastoral work of promoting vocations. The foremost action (*actio princeps*) is prayer in obedience to the mandate of Christ: "Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send labourers into his harvest" (Mt 9,38; Lk 10,2). Thus the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, now in its 39th year, is very valuable for it involves all Christian communities in a common intense prayer so that the Church may have priestly and religious vocations.

I note with satisfaction that through the influence of this Pontifical Society, the idea of holding continental congresses on vocations to priestly ministry and consecrated life has continued. In the coming month of April, after a fruitful involvement of the diocesan and regional communities, the Third Congress for North America will be celebrated in Montreal, after those for Latin America and Europe. It is an event that the whole Church will follow with prayer, as I asked in my Message for the upcoming World Day of Prayer for Vocations. I trust that this important ecclesial event, providentially close in time and place to the celebration of the World Youth Day in Toronto, may bring about in the local Churches a renewed dedication to the recruitment of vocations and a more generous enthusiasm among the Christians of the "New World".

Continue your service for the support of the pastoral care of vocations, in a spirit of joyful gratitude to the Lord for his continuous gift of vocations to the ordained ministry and to consecrated life.

With creative confidence tackle the motives for concern caused by the lack of vocations in some parts of the world, and the serious challenges of the discernment and formation of those who are called.

7. Finally, I thank you for your daily service as a Congregation to the Church in the area of seminaries, universities and schools, in a word, in the vast sector of education. Educational institutions are expected to make a fundamental contribution to building a more human world, founded on the values of justice and solidarity.

As I assure you of my special prayer for your work during the plenary meeting, I invoke an abundance of heavenly light upon you all, for which I cordially impart my Blessing to you.
