



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH***

*Clementine Hall
Friday, 10 February 2006*

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Presbyterate,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I am pleased to meet the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith at the end of its Plenary Meeting, a Congregation over which I had the joy to preside for more than 20 years through the mandate of my Predecessor, the venerable Pope John Paul II.

Your faces also make me think of all those who collaborated with the Dicastery in those years: I remember them all with gratitude and affection. Indeed, I cannot but recall with a certain emotion the very intense and fruitful period which I spent with the Congregation, whose task is to promote and safeguard the doctrine on faith and morals in the entire Catholic Church (cf. *Pastor Bonus*, n. 48).

Faith has a fundamental importance in the life of the Church, because the gift that God makes of himself in Revelation is fundamental and God's gift of himself is accepted through faith.

Here the importance of your Congregation comes to the fore. Through its service to the whole Church and to the Bishops in particular, as teachers of the faith and pastors, it is precisely called in a spirit of collegiality to encourage and to recall the centrality of the Catholic faith in its authentic expression.

Whenever, moreover, the perception of this centrality weakens, the fabric of ecclesial life loses its original brightness and wears thin: it degenerates into sterile activism or is reduced to political expediency with a worldly flavour.

If, instead, the truth of the faith is placed simply and decisively at the heart of Christian existence, human life is innovated and revived by a love that knows no rest or bounds, as I also had the opportunity to recall in my recent Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*.

Charity, like love that renews all things, moves from God's Heart to the Heart of Jesus Christ, and through his Spirit across the world. This love is born from the encounter with Christ in faith: "*Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction*" (*Deus caritas est, n. 1*).

Jesus Christ is the Personified Truth who attracts the world to himself. The light that shines out from Jesus is the splendour of the truth. Every other truth is a fragment of the Truth that he is, and refers to him.

Jesus is the Pole Star of human freedom: without him it loses its sense of direction, for without the knowledge of the truth, freedom degenerates, becomes isolated and is reduced to sterile arbitration. With him, freedom is rediscovered, it is recognized to have been created for our good and is expressed in charitable actions and behaviour.

Therefore, Jesus gives men and women total familiarity with the truth and continuously invites them to live in it. It is truth offered as a reality that restores the human being and at the same time surpasses him and towers above him, as a Mystery that embraces and at the same time exceeds the impulse of his intelligence.

And nothing succeeds as well as love for the truth in impelling the human mind towards unexplored horizons. Jesus Christ, who is the fullness of the truth, draws to himself the heart of each person, enlarges it and fills it with joy. Indeed, truth alone can take possession of the mind and make it rejoice to the full.

It is this joy that increases the dimensions of the human heart, lifting it anew from the narrowness of selfishness and rendering it capable of authentic love. It is the experience of this joy that moves and attracts the human person to free adoration, not to servile prostration but to bow with heartfelt respect before the Truth he has encountered.

Thus, service to the faith, which is a witness to the One who is the entire Truth, is also a service to joy, and this is the joy that Christ desires to spread in the world: it is the joy of faith in him, of truth that is communicated through him, of salvation that comes from him! It is this joy we feel in our hearts when we kneel with faith to worship Jesus!

This love for truth also inspires and directs the Christian approach to the contemporary world and the evangelizing commitment of the Church, topics which you have taken time to discuss at your Plenary Assembly.

The Church welcomes with joy the authentic breakthroughs of human knowledge and recognizes that evangelization also demands a proper grasp of the horizons and the challenges that modern knowledge is unfolding. In fact, the great progress of scientific knowledge that we saw during the last century has helped us understand the mystery of creation better and has profoundly marked the awareness of all peoples.

However, scientific advances have sometimes been so rapid as to make it very difficult to discern whether they are compatible with the truths about man and the world that God has revealed. At times, certain assertions of scientific knowledge have even been opposed to these truths. This may have given rise to a certain confusion among the faithful and may also have made the proclamation and acceptance of the Gospel difficult.

Consequently, every study that aims to deepen the knowledge of the truths discovered by reason is vitally important, in the certainty that there is no "competition of any kind between reason and faith" (*Fides et Ratio*, n. 17).

We must have no fears about facing this challenge: Jesus Christ is indeed the Lord of all creation and of all history. The believer knows well that "all things were created through him and for him... and in him all things hold together" (Col 1: 16, 17).

By continually deepening our knowledge of Christ, the centre of the cosmos and of history, we can show the men and women of our time that faith in him is important for humanity's future: indeed, it is the accomplishment of all that is authentically human. Only in this perspective will we be able to give convincing answers to the person who is searching.

This commitment is crucially important for the proclamation and transmission of the faith in the contemporary world. Today, in fact, the task of evangelizing is an urgent priority and demands equal commitment.

The dialogue between faith and reason, religion and science, does not only make it possible to show people of our time the reasonableness of faith in God as effectively and convincingly as possible, but also to demonstrate that the definitive fulfilment of every authentic human aspiration rests in Jesus Christ. In this regard, a serious evangelizing effort cannot ignore the questions that arise also from today's scientific and philosophical discoveries.

The desire for the truth is part of human nature itself. The whole of creation is an immense invitation to seek those responses that open human reason to the great response that it has

always sought and awaited: "The truth of Christian Revelation, found in Jesus of Nazareth, enables all men and women to embrace the 'mystery' of their own life. As absolute truth, it summons human beings to be open to the transcendent, while respecting both their autonomy as creatures and their freedom. At this point, the relationship between freedom and truth is complete, and we understand the full meaning of the Lord's words: "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free' (Jn 8: 32)" (*Fides et Ratio*, n. 15).

In this the Congregation finds the motive for its commitment and the horizon of its service. Your service to the fullness of the faith is a service to the truth, hence, to joy, a joy that rises from the depths of the heart, that flows from those abysses of love that Christ opened with his Heart pierced on the Cross and that his Spirit pours out into the world with inexhaustible generosity. From this point of view, your doctrinal ministry can appropriately be defined as "pastoral".

Your service, in fact, is a service to the full diffusion of God's light in the world! May the light of faith, expressed in its fullness and integrity, always illumine your work and be the "star" that guides you and helps you to direct human hearts to Christ!

This is the weighty but fascinating task incumbent upon the Successor of Peter in his mission in which you are called to collaborate. Thank you for your work and for your service! With these sentiments I impart my Blessing to you all.

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