



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL FOR RELATIONS
BETWEEN THE CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES
OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE
AND THE MEN'S AND WOMEN'S
INTERNATIONAL UNIONS OF SUPERIORS GENERAL***

Consistory Hall

Monday, 18 February 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

At the end of this morning of common reflection on certain particularly important current aspects of Consecrated Life in our time, I would like first of all to thank the Lord who has given us the opportunity for this meeting, most beneficial for us all. We have been able together to analyse the potentials and expectations, the hopes and difficulties that confront Institutes of Consecrated Life today. I listened with great attention and interest to your testimonies and experiences and I took note of your questions. We are all aware that in our modern globalized society it is becoming increasingly difficult to proclaim and witness to the Gospel. If this applies for all the baptized, it is particularly true for those whom Jesus calls to follow him more radically through religious consecration. Unfortunately, the progressive secularization of contemporary culture does not even spare religious communities.

There is no need, however, to succumb to despair, because despite the many clouds gathering on the horizon of Religious Life, as has been appropriately recalled, signs of a providential reawakening are being seen and indeed are constantly increasing, which give rise to comforting hope. The power of the Holy Spirit's breath is being felt in the Church, inspiring a new commitment to fidelity in the historical Institutes as well as in new forms of religious consecration in tune with the needs of the times. Today, as in every age, there is no lack of generous souls ready to give up everyone and everything to embrace Christ and his Gospel, dedicating to his service their

existence in communities characterized by enthusiasm, generosity and joy. What marks these new experiences of Consecrated Life is the common desire and readiness to share in evangelical poverty practised radically, faithful love for the Church, generous dedication to our neighbour in need, with special attention for those forms of spiritual poverty that are a marked feature of our contemporary epoch.

Like my venerable Predecessors, I too have several times wished to reaffirm that people today feel a strong religious and spiritual call, but are only ready to listen and follow someone who witnesses consistently to his or her own attachment to Christ. And it is interesting to note that those same Institutes that have preserved or chosen a tenor of life that is often very austere and which in any case are faithful to the Gospel lived "*sine glossa*", abound in vocations. I am thinking of the many faithful communities and new experiences of Consecrated Life that you know well. I am thinking of the missionary work of many groups and ecclesial movements in which numerous priestly and religious vocations are born. I am thinking of the young men and women who give up everything to enter cloistered monasteries and convents. It is also true today - and we can say so joyfully - that the Lord is continuing to send workers into his vineyard and to enrich his people with many holy vocations. We thank the Lord for this and pray to him that the enthusiasm of the initial choices - indeed, many young people set out on the path of Gospel perfection and enter new forms of Consecrated Life subsequent to moving conversions - as I was saying, the enthusiasm of the initial decisions may be followed by commitment to persevere in an authentic process of ascetic and spiritual perfection on a journey of true holiness.

With regard to the Orders and Congregations with a long tradition in the Church, we can only note, as you yourselves have stressed, that in the last decades almost all of them, male as well as female, have been through a difficult crisis due to the ageing of members, a more or less pronounced decrease in the number of vocations and sometimes also a spiritual and charismatic "weariness". This crisis in certain cases has even become alarming. Yet side by side with difficult situations, which it is as well to examine with courage and truth, signs of a positive recovery can be recorded, especially when communities have the courage to return to their origins to live more in harmony with the Founder's spirit. In almost all the recent General Chapters of Religious Institutes the recurrent theme has been precisely the rediscovery of the founding charism to be lived and actualized in a renewed manner in the present time. Rediscovering the spirit of the origins, deepening knowledge of the Founder or Foundress, has helped to impress upon Institutes a promising new ascetic, apostolic and missionary impetus. There are long-established works and activities that have thus been revived with new nourishment; there are new initiatives of an authentic actualization of the Founders' charism. It is necessary to continue on this path, praying to the Lord that he will bring to fruition the work he has begun.

On entering the third millennium, my venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God John Paul II, invited the entire Ecclesial Community "to start afresh from Christ" (Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, nn. 29ff.). Yes! Institutes of Consecrated Life also must ceaselessly "start afresh from

Christ" if they mean to preserve or rediscover their vitality and apostolic effectiveness. He is the firm rock on which you must build your communities and every project of community and apostolic renewal. Dear brothers and sisters, I warmly thank you for the care you devote to carrying out your responsible service as guides of your Religious Families. The Pope is close to you, encourages you and assures each one of your communities of his daily remembrance in prayer. As we conclude our meeting, I would like once again to greet with affection the Cardinal Secretary of State and Cardinal Franc Rodé, as well as each one of you. I also ask you to convey my greeting to all your confreres and your Sisters, with a special thought for the elderly who have served your Institutes for a long time, for the sick who contribute to the work of redemption with their suffering, and to the young men and women who are the hope of your different Religious Families and of the Church. I entrust you all to the motherly protection of Mary, the sublime model of the Consecrated Life, as I impart a heartfelt Blessing to you all.