



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO STUDENTS AND TEACHERS
OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL UNIVERSITIES OF ROME***

St Peter's Basilica

Thursday, 30 October 2008

Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters

For me, this traditional meeting with the Roman ecclesiastical universities at the beginning of the academic year is always a reason for joy. I greet you all with great affection, beginning with His Eminence Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski, Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, who presided at the Holy Mass and who I thank for the words with which he expressed your sentiments. I am pleased to greet the other Cardinals and Bishops, and equally so the rectors, professors, directors and superiors of the seminaries and colleges, and naturally you, dear students, who have come from various countries to complete your studies.

In this year, in which we celebrate the bi-millennial jubilee of the birth of the Apostle Paul, I would like to pause briefly together with you on one aspect of his message that seems to me particularly suitable for you, students and academics, and on which I also spoke yesterday in the catechesis during the [General Audience](#). I am referring, then, to what St Paul writes on Christian wisdom, in particular in his First Letter to the Corinthians, a community in which rivalries had broken out among the disciples. The Apostle confronts the problem of these divisions within the community, pointing out a sign of false wisdom among them, or of a mentality that is still immature because it is carnal and not spiritual (cf. 1 Cor 3: 1-3). Referring next to his own experience, Paul reminds the Corinthians that Christ sent him to preach the Gospel "not with worldly 'wisdom', however, lest the cross of Christ be rendered void of its meaning" (1: 17).

From here he takes up a reflection on the "wisdom of the Cross", or, it is worth saying, the wisdom

of God, which opposes the wisdom of this world. The Apostle insists on the existent contrast between the two wisdoms, only one of which is true the divine while the other is in reality "foolishness". Now, the stupefying news, which must always be rediscovered and received, is the fact that divine wisdom, in Christ, has been given to us, has made us participants. At the end of the second chapter of the aforementioned Letter, there is an expression that summarizes this news and for just this reason never ceases to surprise. St Paul writes: "But we have the mind of Christ

(2: 16). This contrast of the two wisdoms is not to be identified with the difference between theology, to one side, and philosophy and science, to the other. It actually concerns two fundamental attitudes. The "wisdom of this world" is a way of living and of viewing things apart from God and following dominant opinions, according to the criteria of success and power. "Divine wisdom" consists in following the mind of Christ it is Christ who opens the eyes of our heart to follow the path of truth and love.

Dear students, you have come to Rome to deepen your knowledge in the theological field, and even if you study other material different from theology, for example law, history, humanities, art, etc., still spiritual formation according to the mind of Christ remains fundamental for you and this is the prospect of your studies. Therefore these words of the Apostle Paul and those that we read immediately after, still in the First Letter to the Corinthians, are important for you: "Who, for example, knows a man's innermost self but the man's own spirit within him? Similarly no one knows what lies at the depths of God but the Spirit of God. The Spirit we have received is not the world's spirit but God's Spirit, helping us to recognize the gifts he has given us" (2: 11-12). Here we are still within the sphere of contrast between human wisdom and that which is divine. In order to know and understand spiritual things it is necessary to be spiritual men and women, because if one is of the flesh one inevitably falls into foolishness, even if one studies much and becomes "scholarly" and a "master of worldly argument" (cf. 1: 20).

In this Pauline text we can see an approach as meaningful as the Gospel verses that tell of Jesus' blessing of God the Father, because the Lord says "you have hidden these things from the wise and clever and revealed them to babes" (Mt 11: 25). The "wise" of which Jesus speaks are those which Paul calls the "wise of this world". Meanwhile, the "babes" are those who the Apostle calls "foolish", "weak", "low and despised" (1: 27-28), but who in reality, if they accept "the word of the Cross" (1: 18), become truly wise. This is why Paul exhorts those who consider themselves wise according to worldly criteria to "become a fool", to become truly wise before God (3: 18). This is not an anti-intellectual attitude; it is not in opposition to *recta ratio*. Paul following Jesus is opposed to the type of arrogant intellectualism, in which a man, even if he knows a great deal, loses sensitivity to truth and the freedom to open himself to the newness of divine action.

Thus dear friends, this Pauline reflection does not at all wish to lead to an undervaluing of the human effort necessary for knowledge, but instead it places it on another level: Paul cared to emphasize and he does so without compromise what it is that truly counts for salvation and what

instead can bring division and ruin. The Apostle thus denounces the poison of false wisdom, that is, human pride. It is not in fact knowledge in itself that can do harm, but the presumption, the "bragging" over what one has come or presumes to have come to know. It is precisely here that divisions and disagreements originate in the Church and, analogously, in society. Thus it entails a cultivation of wisdom not according to the flesh, but rather according to the Spirit. We know well that St Paul with the words "flesh, carnal" does not refer to the body, but to a way of living only for oneself and according to worldly standards. Therefore, according to Paul, it is always necessary to purify one's own body of the poison of pride, present in each one of us. We too, with St Paul, must raise the cry: "Who will free us?" (cf. Rm 7: 24). And we too can receive with him the response: the grace of Jesus Christ, that the Father has given us through the Holy Spirit (cf. Rm 7: 25). The "mind of Christ", which through grace we have received, purifies us of false wisdom. And this "mind of Christ" welcomes us through the Church and into the Church, taking us to the river of her living tradition. The iconography that depicts Jesus-Wisdom in the womb of Mother Mary, symbol of the Church, expresses this very well: *In gremio Matris sedet Sapientia Patris*; in Mary's womb sits the Wisdom of the Father, that is, Christ. Remaining faithful to that Jesus who Mary offers us, to the Christ whom the Church presents to us, we can commit ourselves intensely to intellectual work, internally free from the temptation of pride and boasting always and only in the Lord.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is the wish that I extend to you at the beginning of the academic year, invoking upon all of you the maternal protection of Mary, *Sedes Sapientiae*, and of the Apostle Paul. My affectionate Blessing goes with you, as well.

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