



## The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE FAITH  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY**

*Friday, 15 January 2010*

*Your Eminences,  
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,  
Dear Faithful Collaborators,*

It gives me great joy to meet you on the occasion of the Plenary Session and to express to you my sentiments of deep gratitude and cordial appreciation of the work you carry out at the service of the Successor of Peter in his ministry of strengthening his brethren in the faith (cf. Lk 22: 32).

I thank Cardinal William Joseph Levada for his greeting in which he recalled the topics that the Congregation is occupied at this time. He also recalled the new responsibilities that the Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Unitatem has entrusted to the Dicastery by closely joining with it the Ecclesia Dei Commission.

I would now like to reflect briefly on certain aspects that you, Your Eminence, have mentioned.

First of all I wish to emphasize that your Congregation participates in the *ministry of unity* that is entrusted to the Roman Pontiff in a special way, through his commitment to doctrinal fidelity. This unity, in fact, is primarily a *unity of faith*, supported by the sacred deposit whose main custodian and defender is the Successor of Peter. Strengthening brothers and sisters in the faith, keeping them united in the confession of the Crucified and Risen Christ, is the first and fundamental task that Jesus conferred upon the one seated on the Chair of Peter. It is a binding service on which depends the effectiveness of the Church's evangelizing action to the end of time.

The Bishop of Rome, in whose *potestas docendi* your Congregation participates, is bound to proclaim ceaselessly: "*Dominus Iesus*" "Jesus is Lord". The *potestas docendi*, in fact, entails

obedience to the faith so that the Truth which is Christ may continue to shine out in its grandeur and resonate in its integrity and purity for all humankind, and thus that there may be one flock gathered round the one Pastor.

The achievement of the common witness to faith of all Christians therefore constitutes the priority of the Church of all time, in order to lead all people to the encounter with God. In this spirit I trust in particular in the Dicastery's commitment to overcome doctrinal problems that are still an obstacle to the achievement of full communion with the Church on the part of the *Society of St Pius x*.

I would also like to congratulate you on your commitment to fully integrating formerly Anglican groups and individual members of the faithful into the Church's life, in accordance with what is stipulated in the Apostolic Constitution *Anglicanorum Coetibus*. The faithful adherence of these groups to the truth received from Christ and presented by the Magisterium of the Church is in no way contrary to the ecumenical movement but rather shows its ultimate purpose, which consists in the achievement of the full and visible communion of the Lord's disciples.

In recalling your invaluable service to the Vicar of Christ, I must also mention that in September 2008 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published the Instruction *Dignitas Personae* on Certain Bioethical Questions. Following the Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* by the Servant of God John Paul II in March 1995 this doctrinal document, centred on the theme of the dignity of the person created in Christ and for Christ, is a new landmark in the proclamation of the Gospel in full continuity with the Instruction *Donum Vitae*, published by this Dicastery in February 1987.

Concerning delicate and timely topics such as procreation and the new forms of treatment that involve the manipulation of embryos and the human genetic patrimony, the Instruction recalls that "the ethical value of biomedical science is gauged in reference to both the unconditional respect owed to every human being at every moment of his or her existence, and the defense of the specific character of the personal act which transmits life" (Instruction *Dignitas Personae*, n. 10). In this way the Magisterium of the Church wishes to make its own contribution to the formation of consciences, not only of believers but also of all who seek the truth and want to listen to arguments stemming not only from faith but also from reason. In fact the Church, in proposing moral evaluations for biomedical research on human life, draws on the light of both reason and faith (cf. *ibid.*, n. 3), since she is convinced that "what is human is not only received and respected by faith, but is also purified, elevated and perfected" (*ibid.*, n. 7).

In this context a response is likewise given to the widespread mentality that presents faith as an obstacle to scientific freedom and research, because it presumes that faith is made up of a pattern of prejudices that hinder the objective understanding of reality. Faced with this attitude that strives to replace truth with a consensus that is fragile and easy to manipulate, the Christian faith, instead, makes a real contribution in the ethical and philosophical context. It does not provide pre-constituted solutions to concrete problems like bio-medical research and experimentation, but

rather proposes reliable moral perspectives within which human reason can seek and find valid solutions.

There are in fact specific contents of Christian revelation that cast light on bioethical problems: the value of human life, the relational and social dimension of the person, the connection between the unitive and the procreative aspects of sexuality, and the centrality of the family founded on the marriage of a man and a woman. These matters engraved in the human heart are also rationally understandable as an element of natural moral law and can be accepted also by those who do not identify with the Christian faith.

The natural moral law is neither exclusively nor mainly confessional, even if the Christian Revelation and the fulfilment of Man in the mystery of Christ fully illumines and develops its doctrine. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, it "states the first and essential precepts which govern the moral life" (n. 1955). Established in human nature itself and accessible to every rational creature, the natural moral law thus determines the basis for initiating dialogue with all who seek the truth and, more generally, with civil and secular society. This law, engraved in every human being's heart, touches on one of the essential problems of reflection on law and likewise challenges the conscience and responsibility of legislators.

As I encourage you to persevere in your demanding and important service, I would also like on this occasion to express my spiritual closeness to you, as a pledge of my affection and gratitude, as I warmly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you all.

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