



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE RECTORS, PROFESSORS AND STUDENTS OF THE INSTITUTES OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION IN ROME

Wednesday, 4 April 1979 Beloved Brothers and Sons, Allow me to address, in the first place, the Cardinal Prefect Gabriel-Marie Garrone, to whom I wish to express sincere thanks both for his presence, and for the noble words he has just pronounced. Everyone knows the commitment with which he has striven, for long years, as the principal person responsible for the guidance of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education. Well-known, too, is the contribution which, with the sensitiveness of a Pastor attentive and open to the requirements of the new times, from the preparatory phase, to the Second Vatican Council. These are merits which I wish to acknowledge publicly today, while to the Cardinals who, as Members of the same Congregation, have gathered for the annual plenary session, to the Secretary, and to the Under-Secretary, I extend my deepest gratitude. I then address my cordial greeting to the Professors, Superiors, and Students of the Roman Centres of Academic Studies. At the opening of the meeting, I would like to start with a personal reference: for several years I had the opportunity to take part in the work of this Sacred Congregation, and it was a very precious experience for me. Because not only did I draw great benefit from it, but, at the same time, I was able to compare it with experiences in my field of pastoral work in Poland. As you well know, Catholic Schools of every order and level are the object of the concern of this Congregation; but the ecclesiastical Seminaries are the object of very special concern. This immediately brings up the serious and delicate problem of priestly vocations, without forgetting, of course, the problem of the Superior Institutes of various types: the Universities, Theological Faculties, the other Faculties of Ecclesiastical Studies, etc. And also in this connection, I must recall that I took part in the important work of the Congregation for the preparation of the new Apostolic Constitution, which will replace—as legislative document—the Constitution *Deus Scientiarum Dominus*. On the basis of the mandate of the Second Vatican Council, a "temporary" document had already been published in May 1968: *Normae quaedam ad Constitutionem Apostolicam "Deus Scientiarum Dominus" de studiis academicis ecclesiasticis recognoscendam*. Subsequently, after consultation of all the sectors interested in doctrine and in Catholic teaching, abundant material has been collected to draw up the new Constitution, which will have to be promulgated shortly. Now—and this is a third premise of psychological and personal character—all the problems concerning Christian education, the particular significance of science in the historical experience of the Church, the present mission of the Church herself in this field, are subjects especially close and congenial to me. In fact, I greatly appreciate this sector of the Church's activity, because I have great esteem for human culture: *Genus humanum arte et ratione vivit*. If man—as I wrote in my first Encyclical—is "the primary and fundamental way for the Church" (cf. *Redemptor Hominis*, 14), how could the latter not take an interest in what, even at the simple natural level, is directly connected with the elevation of man? How could she remain extraneous to the needs and the

ferments, the labour and the goals, the difficulties and the achievements of culture today? Would not such a lack of interest and extraneousness be almost a shirking of her own responsibilities and an act of omission owing to the "vulnus" that would result in her own evangelizing function? In interpreting the supreme command of Christ, I am of the opinion that the pregnant significance and the multiple implications of the words *docete* and *docentes* (cf. Mt 28:18-19; in the Greek text *matheteúsate* and *didáskontes*), are never stressed enough. You understand, therefore, how, according to such a broad and high perspective, today's meeting takes place not only with you here present, but, at least indirectly and certainly intentionally, includes teachers and students of all Catholic Institutes of instruction and education, scattered all over the world. Their tasks, their mission, their "creative" contribution to the universal mission of the Church, are, as it were, the background to this solemn audience today.² In a more immediate and direct environment, however, the audience gathers a select and large group of representatives of the Superior Institutes of Rome, and that gives me great joy. I desired this meeting deeply, and I am happy that it takes place just at the time when the Cardinals and other representatives of the episcopate are gathered for the annual session at the Sacred Congregation, which is in charge of the organization and animation of the mission of the Church in the scientific and educational field. The initiative for our meeting came from the Rectors of the Roman Institutes, with whom I have already had an opportunity to discuss the preliminaries of problems so important for the life of the Church in the Eternal City. These Institutes, in fact, represent a special wealth of this Church: on the one hand, they welcome a large group of professors, scientists, and scholars who, thanks to their intelligence and their preparation, do honour to doctrine and to the faith; on the other hand, they are open to students all over the world, and constitute, therefore, a significant and inspiring "sample" of the nationalities, languages, cultural elements and ritual varieties of the Catholic world. For this reason, and not only now, they have won well-deserved international recognition. As for me, I wish to name them separately here, as a proof of my esteem and confidence in them, and these sentiments are intended to confirm and extend in time—I would say—those of so many predecessors of mine on Peter's Chair. Here in the first place, is the group of Universities that bear the title "Pontifical": the Gregorian, entrusted to the Sons of St Ignatius and rich in a centuries-old and well-tested teaching and scientific experience; the Lateran which, being close, and not just topographically, to St John's Patriarchal Basilica and the Major Seminary of Rome, has a typical Roman character and a special function; then the Urbanian University, intended specifically for the primary cause of evangelization and for the formation of the Clergy for the Missions; and then the University of St Thomas Aquinas, known as the *Angelicum*, at which I had the good fortune to attend an industrious two years' course, which I have always remembered; and finally the Salesian which, though recently founded, wishes to win recognition with a note of originality in the area of the pedagogical disciplines. These follow the Anselmian and Antonian *Pontifical Athenaea*, directed by the Religious of St Benedict and St Francis. Then, further, the Biblical and the Oriental *Institutes* and the *Institutes* for Sacred Music and Christian Archaeology. And finally the *Theological Faculties* of St Bonaventure, *Teresianum*, *Marianum*. Including also the Institute of Arabic Studies and the *Auxilium* Faculty, the Academic Centres existing in Rome amount altogether to 16, with a total number of over 950 lecturers and about 7,000 matriculated students. Are they many, are they few? Beyond the quantitative datum, which is variable in itself and, in any case, not absolute, there is the grandiose and consoling panorama of a whole series of *living and highly qualified forces*; there is the *reality of wealth* which, before being cultural and doctrinal, is of a spiritual nature; *this admirable complex of didactic structures* is at the disposal not only of the Catholic Church, but also of the human society which the Church is called to serve. To confirm the prestige and the further potentialities of these forces, it is sufficient to draw attention to two facts: a) The first is the multiplicity of the *scientific specializations*, which exist within these same Centres. It is not possible to talk of duplication or of useless schools, because, if the schema of the fundamental sacred disciplines (beginning with the queen-science, theology), is found and functions—as is obvious—in them all, there is in each one a characteristic

note, as it were, such as to give it an original place in the general framework of ecclesiastical studies. I am thinking, in this connection, of the various "specialities" and "superior schools" of modern conception, which have been created, with brilliant intuition, in more recent years. This is a response to the cultural growth of the world. b) The other fact that I wish to recall in terms of praise, is that the above-mentioned "specialties" and, therefore, the specialized Institutes in question, are available for a fruitful collaboration with other "specialties" and Institutes. In this way, to the objective requirement, which today is emerging more and more in scientific activity and methodology—*the requirement of so-called interdisciplinarity*—and to the need of avoiding cultural particularism and fragmentation, you have likewise responded with open, intelligent, generous, and fruitful collaboration. And it is a pleasure for me to recognize the importance of this active cultural exchange, which means improving the coordination of initiatives, a timely comparison of results, and balanced assignment of the researches to be carried out. All that, while it promotes the general increase of good studies, also multiplies contacts between persons to their mutual advantage, stimulates integration among the various Institutes, and bears witness to the liveliness and vitality of the pace of studies within the Church.³ But at this point, I would like to emphasize above all the importance of a *real scientific formation in priestly formation as a whole*, as I recall also in the Letter that I will address to Priests for the forthcoming Holy Thursday. If the Church sets such store by the promotion of higher studies and, therefore, the preparation of adequate structures, she does so, "ultimately" to carry out better her mission in the world and to serve the cause of man better. But she does so "directly" to prepare those to whom, to such a large extent, this mission and this service are delegated: that is the Priests. To be complete and adapted to the requirements of the times, the formation of Priests must also be scientific. And the reason, or rather, reasons for this more demanding preparation are so evident that all explanation seems to me superfluous. Necessary, first and foremost, in the sacred ministries is a *sound general culture*, as a fruitful and receptive soil for new seeds, admitting of more luxuriant developments. Then they must be started on their way and helped to reach a *real and proper specialization at the University level*, which will make them capable of taking part in the creative processes of culture in any type of society in which the Church finds herself carrying out her mission (cf. Decree *Optatam Totius*, 38). Here, then, are the two elements of this formation: general culture and specialized culture. Actually, the necessity of a rich doctrinal store for the formation of a mature priestly personality, such as is suitable for one who must be a pastor and teacher and is called to carry out multiform services connected with the vocation of the priest, pastor, and teacher, can never be sufficiently stressed. Today this is a task of unusual and great responsibility. We need men with a deep knowledge of the problems of man and of the world. But this knowledge cannot stop at the purely human and secular level: it will have to be based, above all, on the "science of faith". It will have, in fact, to spring from a precise attitude of faith, from an active exercise of faith, which means communion and conversation with the Word of God, the Teacher who teaches and dictates "ab intus": *Ille... qui consulitur, docet, qui in interiore homine habitare dictus est Christus, id est incommutabilis Dei Virtus atque sempiterna Sapientia* (St Augustine, *De Magistro* 11, 38; P.L. 32, 1216; cf. Ephes. 3:16; I Cor 1:24). We need Priests endowed with a sound theological sense, listening attentively to Holy Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium. We need Priests who, teaching faith and morality, will construct and not destroy. All this presupposes doctrinal completeness, intellectual honesty, faithful adherence to the "sacred deposit", awareness of participation in the "prophetic function" of Christ: in a word, a maturity of superior quality is necessary.⁴ In this vast set of problems, reference to which would deserve a far longer development, I wish to point out another aspect. I consider, in fact, that special attention must be paid to the "existence of Rome", as an element of that formation which brings to every local Church a wholesome and extremely fruitful leaven of universality. Saying this, I draw on the memories of the time of my studies in Rome and also of the experiences I had during my subsequent contacts with "sacred Rome", which offers vital sap and nourishment to every Christian, and particularly, to every Priest. What does Rome teach? *Hic saxa ipsa loquuntur*, it can rightly be said.

Oh, it is not rhetorical to lay stress on this historico-environmental fact: Rome, a unique city in the world, is the centre of irradiation of Christian faith. It is necessary, therefore, to be aware of this fact, it is necessary to be worthy of it; it is necessary to respond to—and to collaborate with—the exemplary function that is incumbent on Rome with regard to the whole Catholic world. And you young people, who have the fortune to study in Rome, must "profit" by this stay and by the teaching that is imparted to you here. You must draw firmness of faith and breadth of perspectives from the memories that the witness of the Apostles Peter and Paul, the blood of the innumerable Martyrs, the vestiges of a religious situation that is now bimillenary, have concentrated here. 5. It is in this spirit that, as Easter draws near, I address my confident good wishes to all members of the Superior Institutes. And it is in this spirit that I express my fervent good wishes to the Congregation for Catholic Education, to its venerated and well-deserving Prefect, to the Cardinals and Bishops. To one and all, connected by a commitment which, though having different expressions and forms, is in purpose unitarian because it is directed to the same goal, I recommend to live this solemn hour of the Church with attentive and clear awareness (cf. *Redemptor Hominis*, 1). As mankind is approaching the year two thousand, it is not permissible for the People of God to delay, to stop, or to move back. The Church must walk in history with her eyes turned backwards (*Ecclesia retro-oculata*) and at the same time forwards (*Ecclesia ante-oculata*), but, above all, fixed upwards towards Christ, her Lord (*Ecclesia supra-oculata*): *levatis ad Dominum oculis*... It is from above, in fact, it is from him that she gets inspiration, strength, resistance, courage. And how could the members of the People of God remain inactive? Beloved Brothers and Sons, the post-conciliar period brought with it a set of questions for the Church, as if continuing the fundamental questions of the Second Vatican Council: *Ecclesia Dei, quid dicis de te ipsa?* Now it would be a form of reticence not to speak of the crisis that occurred; or to deny, for example, that certain questions were sometimes raised in a "radical" form and assumed a character of "contestation"; or to ignore that the latter among other things, concerned and almost attacked the ministerial priesthood, the priestly vocation, as well as the seminary as an institution. There is no need, moreover, to recall the heat of some debates and polemics. Yet so many discussions have brought about opportune clarifications and definitions. After study of those problems had been resumed—let it suffice to think of the 1971 Synod—after the objections or the new elements of the various questions had been thoroughly examined, things returned to their proper places, and significant confirmations have been derived. It can be said that, thanks to this critical and self-critical effort, we are already beginning to pass from the "negative" phase to a "positive" implementation of Vatican II, that is, to that authentic renewal or "aggiornamento" which was among the aims of the lovable Pontiff who courageously decided on it. With all those present I pray to the Lord Jesus, in his paschal mystery, in order that such a renewal may be manifested in the vast sector of education and instruction, in particular by means of a new flourishing of holy vocations in all the local Churches, I say priestly, religious, and missionary vocations: vocations that are mature thanks to the Institutions in question, that is, Seminaries, Studentates and University Centres; vocations mature with that maturity of which witnesses to the Gospel have need in our times which are so difficult and heavy with responsibilities. *Spes non confundit!* (Rom 5:5). Not all the difficulties are overcome, but it is now time to go on our way, with hope that is never disappointed, relying on the un failing help of him who, if he entrusted the Church to men, guaranteed that he would not abandon them: *Ecce ego vobiscum sum omnibus diebus* (Mt 28:20). With an expression that was dear to my Predecessor and Father, Paul VI, I will therefore say: Onward in the Lord's name and with my affectionate Blessing! ©

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