



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE RECTORS OF ENGLISH, SCOTTISH
AND MALTESE MAJOR SEMINARIES***

Saturday, 3 March 1979

THE PRESENCE here this morning of a group of Rectors of seminaries, including important Pontifical Colleges in this City, brings to my mind many considerations. There are many thoughts that I, as Bishop of Rome and Pastor of the universal Church, wish to share with you, my beloved brothers and sons in the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ. But I also hope that my words today will be known by other seminary Rectors throughout the world, and that through them the expression of my love will reach all their students.

Today, then, my first thought is for all the seminarians. I ask you to take back to them my greetings, assuring them, in my name, how much their fidelity means to the Church, how much the future of evangelization depends on their generosity, and how great a role they are called to play in that authentic renewal of the People of God that was willed by the Second Vatican Council. Yes, my message to the seminarians is one of profound interest in their welfare and of deep affection for them as future partners in the Gospel of Christ.

Precisely because of the great hope that I have in the seminarians of this generation, I am particularly pleased to reflect with you, their Rectors, on the task that is yours. You have been called by your Bishops to exercise a role of special spiritual leadership in the Church of Christ. And today I wish to speak to you about certain fundamental issues, in order to confirm you in your mission.

By meditating yourselves on these issues you will see ever more clearly the goal of your own specific ministry of service in the training of future priests. You will thus have clear criteria for knowing what the Church desires, above all else, to be at the foundation of seminary life; you will have clear guidelines for determining the priorities of your institutions, and those means that are

truly apt to put these priorities into practice.

In a word, the first priority for seminaries today is the teaching of God's word in all its purity and integrity, with all its exigencies and in all its power. The word of God – and the word of God alone – is the basis for all ministry, for all pastoral activity, for all priestly action.

The power of God's word constituted the dynamic basis of the Second Vatican Council, and John XXIII pointed out clearly on the day it opened: "The greatest concern of the Ecumenical Council is this: that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be more effectively guarded and taught"[1].

And if the seminarians of this generation are to be adequately prepared to take on the heritage and challenge of this Council, they must be trained above all in God's word: in "the sacred deposit of christian doctrine". We all know what love Saint Paul had for the word of God, and with what urgency his words apply to all the priests of the Church: "guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit"[2]. In fulfilling this holy responsibility, seminaries must play a primary role and give an outstanding witness.

A second issue of great importance that deeply affects seminaries today is that of ecclesiastical discipline. With simplicity and forthrightness John Paul I spoke to his clergy about the "great discipline"[3]. On that occasion he stated: "The 'great discipline' requires a suitable atmosphere. And first of all, an atmosphere of recollection" (*raccoglimento*). It is my conviction that with this suitable atmosphere, and through the grace of God, the great discipline required for seminaries will be achieved and joyfully maintained. And the reason for all of this is found in the impelling love of Christ and his brethren. The sacrifice, effort and generosity entailed in the preparation for the priesthood have meaning only if they are done *propter regnum Dei*. They are possible only with prayer.

When the word of God is seen as the basis of all seminary life and training, and when the great discipline of the Church is embraced by the seminarians as a service to charity, then the seminaries themselves become, in the words of Paul VI, "houses of deep faith and authentic Christian asceticism, as well as joyful communities sustained by Eucharistic piety"[4].

In the years ahead all of us must work for the purification of the Church, in accordance with the Gospel, and following the directives of the Second Vatican Council. In so doing, we hope to offer to the Saviour his Church – holy and worthy of his love: a Church in which numerous young men are imbued with the mystery of Christ, and, basing their lives on his word, give themselves in generous preparation for his ministry.

This preparation and training depends to a great extent on you. I repeat: you have been called to exercise a role of special spiritual leadership in the Church. Christ depends on you and is with you.

And the Pope is with you and blesses you.

[1] Ioannis XXIII *Allocutio in sollemni SS. Concilii inauguratione*, die 11 octobris 1962.

[2] *2 Tim.* 1, 14.

[3] Ioannis Pauli I, *Allocutio*, die 7 septembris 1978.

[4] Pauli VI *Allocutio*, die 16 aprilis 1975.

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