



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE COMMUNITY
OF THE PONTIFICAL REGIONAL SEMINARY OF APULIA, ITALY**

Saturday, 16 January 1999

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,

Dear Young People,

1. Welcome! It is a joy to receive you today for this appreciated visit. I extend my cordial greetings to you all.

With a heart full of gratitude, I thank your rector and welcome his words on behalf of each one of you: they are the expression of a relationship that finds in faith its most authentic value and most complete development.

Your visit coincides with a particularly significant date for you: just over a month ago you celebrated the 90th anniversary of the foundation of your seminary, where numerous priests have been formed for nine decades. Let us thank the Lord for this happy anniversary and for the goals achieved in this period.

2. The date you are celebrating is rich in memories: throughout this century your "home" has welcomed and formed generations of sacred ministers who, in various areas of the ecclesial community, have carried out and continue to carry out their service as deacons, priests, Bishops and Cardinals. Many young people who did not continue on the path of the priesthood also found there, in an important period of their lives, the "face" and concern of a friendly and familiar place.

The date you are commemorating is also rich in promise: your seminary is still fired with enthusiasm today and continues to welcome young people who wish to reflect on a vocation in the Church and for the world. They are offered an educational experience that can transform their intention into a fruitful apostolic reality.

Every seminary is founded with a well-defined aim: to prepare the Church's future ministers in an atmosphere of prayer, study and brotherhood. "Pastores dabo vobis": the Lord promises his flock shepherds "after his own heart" (Jer 3:15).

The period spent in the seminary is totally oriented to this goal: to see that the young men preparing for the priesthood

undergo this "transformation of the heart", which will spur them to love and serve the Ecclesial Community with the same sentiments as Christ's.

A regional seminary emphasizes how this community and its ministers are rooted in a specific territory, recognizable by specific geographical features, by a common history, by original expressions of life and culture, which, by interacting with the other territorial realities, shape attitudes and customs. The seminary then becomes a privileged instrument of the particular Churches, called to make present "here and now" the mystery of ecclesial communion. It must be an "educational ecclesial community ... committed to formation, the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation of future priests" (*Pastores dabo vobis*, n. 61). For this reason, the formation given in your "home" must include a loving and intelligent look at the dynamics that characterize the environment in which the Christian communities of Apulia live and work.

3. From its ancient acceptance of the faith to its modern concerns about secularization, from its popular piety to the outreach of the new evangelization, from the emigration of its ancestors to the current forms of hospitality offered to refugees and immigrants, from its traditional agricultural, pastoral and maritime life to the profound economic and cultural changes of the present day, the characteristics of the region deserve your reflection and must be a constant reference-point in your formation.

From this standpoint, it seems to me that two particularly significant signs emerge from a date so rich in future prospects as your seminary's 90th anniversary: the timeliness, first of all, of the decision taken at the time to establish a structure for philosophical-theological education in Apulia. This has helped entire generations of young people to deepen their knowledge of the relationship, problematic but inescapable, between "fides et ratio". In our century, cooperation between faith and reason has produced great projects; their divergence has given rise to dreadful tragedies.

The second sign can be seen in the teaching, and even more in the lives, of the Pontiffs whose names are more closely associated with your seminary: St Pius X founded it and established it in Lecce, and Pius XI subsequently enlarged it and moved it to Molfetta. The actions of my two venerable Predecessors can shed light on the important challenges that await you. Despite the difficulties that the two Pontiffs had to face both in the Church and in their relations with the secular world, they remain great examples of fidelity to Christ and of ardent zeal for the cause of the Gospel. Their witness is an invitation both to doctrinal soundness and to courageous openness; it is also an incentive to holiness of life and apostolic daring in view of the demands of the contemporary world.

I sincerely hope that the Pontifical Regional Seminary of Apulia will be a "school of apostles" as my Predecessors wished: apostles willing to serve God's People with all their energy. May your seminary form priests who will be sure guides for the faithful in the footsteps of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

May the Virgin Mary, whom you venerate as the "Regina Apuliae", accompany your steps with her example and her prayers, rekindle your hopes and sustain you in difficult moments, so that the vocational plan which God has for each of you may be fulfilled.

As I assure you of a constant remembrance in my prayer, I cordially impart to you all my Apostolic Blessing.